LINKIN PARK

METEORA AT 20: "WE HAD SOMETHING TO PROVE"

METAL HAMMER

METALLICA

SEVEN YEARS. ONE PANDEMIC. 72 SEASONS.

GOJIRA
AAA IN PARIS FOR THEIR BIGGEST SHOW EVER

KILLSWITCH
MUSHROOMS! DOUBLE-DENIM! NEW MUSIC?

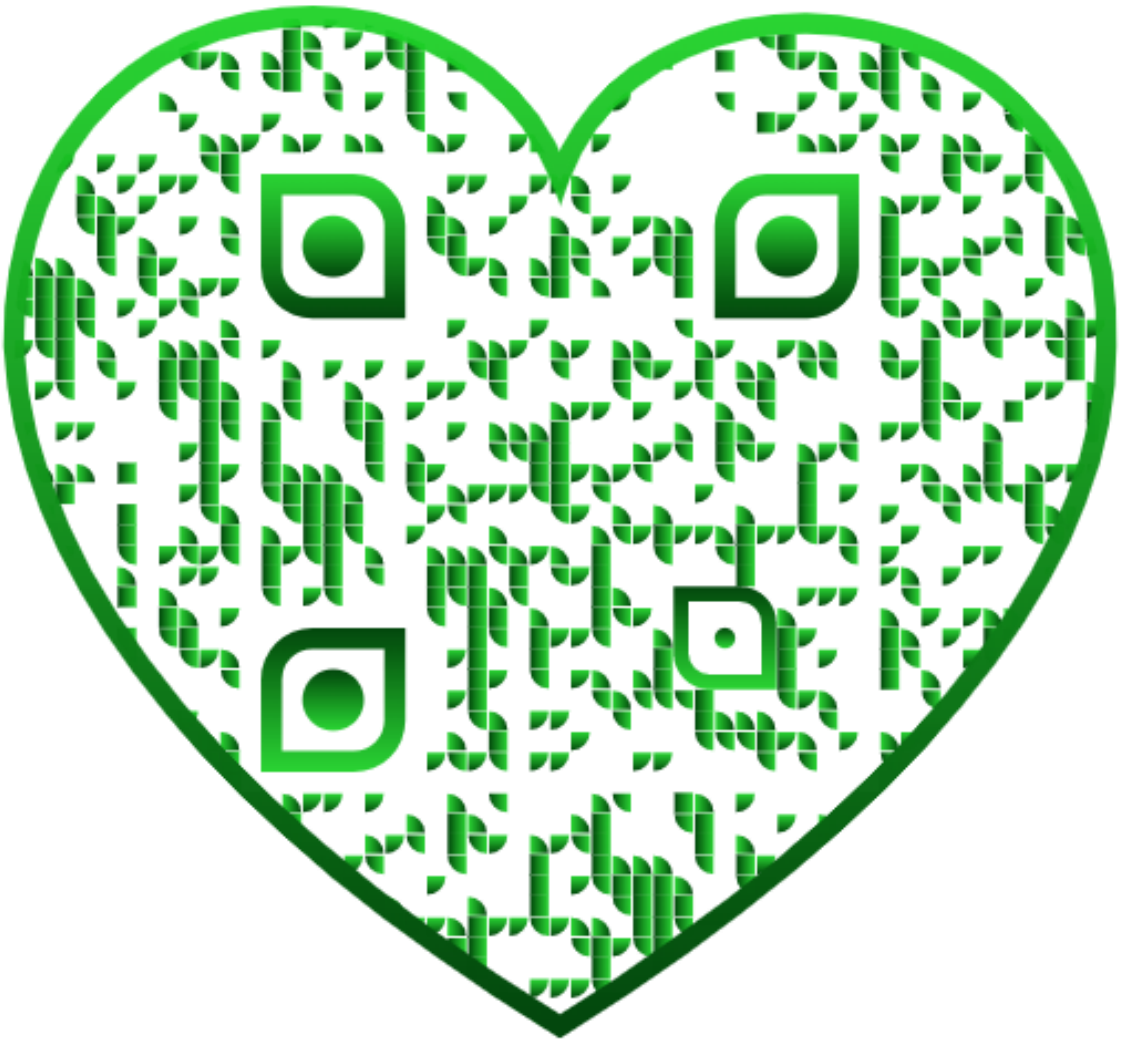
SOPHIE LLOYD
FROM YOUTUBE FAME TO ARENA STARDOM

ICE-T
ON SKINHEADS, SLAYER AND COP KILLER

ZULU SWOLLEN TEETH
ZEAL & ARDOR **LOVEBITES**

FUTURE
ISSUE 373

THE EXPLOITED & UK82
BULLET FOR MY VALENTINE



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METALLICA GIVES YOU HEAVY, BABY!

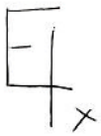
WE'VE BEEN DESPERATE to get our hands on *72 Seasons* since we heard the adrenaline-rush of *Lux Æterna*, the first original music from Metallica in six years, last November. However, that single was a little misleading, as our Dave Everley found out when he sat down with the band for this month's cover feature (p.36).

Created amid the grimness of the pandemic, and fuelled by James Hetfield's most "daring" lyrics yet, as he dug into the idea of how a person's formative years shape them – see the timespan of the title, and the artwork of a blackened, broken crib – it sees the band excavating new personal depths, bringing the heavy in all senses of the word.

And yet, there is light in the darkness, as you'll hear on *72 Seasons*' epic closing track, *Inamorata*. And with the band ramping up for their wildest tour yet, featuring double dates in single cities, plus a central snake pit for fans, we're buzzing with excitement for their latest era (hurry up, Download! How many more sleeps?!). More than four decades in, they're still surprising us.

Metal isn't metal without Metallica. Full speed or nothin'. Welcome the fuck back.

Stay metal,



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SCAN TO GET OUR WEEKLY NEWSLETTER

MEET THE BAND

RICH HOBSON
STAFF WRITER
Months in the making, our staff writer Rich took a deep-dive into the UK82 punk scene for this issue. Fun fact: he actually met his partner after a GBH gig in a pub in 2014. Ah, romance... Turn to p.76 to read his feature.

KATJA OGRIN
PHOTOGRAPHER
It's impossible for Katja to take a bad picture. In fact, they're so good, we might just stop printing words in the magazine and stick with pics. This month, we sent her to London's Ally Pally for Gojira's stupidly good mega-show.

ELLIOT LEAVER
WRITER
A long-suffering Chelsea FC fan (from his current vantage point of Bristol), and a man who can give any other Maiden obsessive a run for their money (or nearby hill), Elliot is a gig-going machine who's reported back from BFMV this month.

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Head to p.34 for details

72 SWOLLEN TEETH

94 POWERWOLF

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GETTY

THE BIG PICTURE

PRAISE THE LORDS

INDUSTRIAL GOTHS LORD Of The Lost will represent Germany at the Eurovision Song Contest this year, with their song *Blood & Glitter*. Founded in 2007 by Chris Harms as a Myspace project, Lord Of The Lost quickly grew into a full band and have released eight albums. They won the opportunity to play thanks to a public vote in their home country.

"We are the band with the best fans in the world: you!" said Chris.

Since Lordi won with *Hard Rock Hallelujah* in 2006, Eurovision has featured a smattering of heavy acts, including Hungarian post-hardcore troupe AWS in 2018, Iceland's Rammstein-like Hatari in 2019, and Finland's Blind Channel and Italian winners Måneskin in 2021. As well as Lord Of The Lost, this year's contest – to be held in Liverpool during May 9–13 – will feature Australian prog-metallers Voyager, with their song *Promise*. Could this be heavy music's year again?

THE HOT TOPIC

YOU WANTED JOHN WICK BACK. HE'S BACK

Keanu Reeves' unkillable assassin returns – with a gloriously OTT metal-friendly soundtrack

WORDS: EMILY SWINGLE

John Wick: still pissed off about his pooch

HE'S BIG, HE'S bad, he's killed three men with a single pencil – it's the return of Baba Yaga himself. When John Wick swaggered onto the big screen in 2014, Keanu Reeves' slick, vengeance-hungry charmer took the world by storm. With its hyper-stylised aesthetics and artfully choreographed fight scenes, *John Wick* breathed new life into the action thriller genre, and, after two more glorious movies, Mr Wick is back and more badass than ever, as the fourth instalment of the gritty neon-noir franchise – *Chapter 4* – hits cinemas.

Stylish (and brutal) as the action may be, there's one other aspect that heightens the *John Wick* experience: a gorgeous score. From operatic highs to rumbling lows, the soundtracks are as diverse as they are absolutely stunning. A collaborative effort from composers Tyler Bates and Joel J. Richard, they masterfully interweave elements of techno, industrial metal and synth-rock.

"IT WAS LIKE WRITING MUSIC WHILE STARING INTO A FIREHOSE"

"Some of the things we're doing sonically completely defy logic and music theory," Tyler marvels.

Established in Hollywood due to his work on everything from Zack Snyder's *Dawn Of The Dead* remake, to Rob Zombie's *The Devil's Rejects* and James Gunn's *Guardians Of The Galaxy* films, Tyler has also worked on TV and videogame soundtracks, and with recording artists including Bush and Jerry Cantrell. With such a varied CV, he brings a range of influences to *John Wick*'s soundtracks.

For the fourth instalment of the series, Tyler has embraced the adage 'go big or go home', not only in terms of scope, but in a more literal sense: *John Wick: Chapter 4* has the longest soundtrack yet, clocking in at more than two-and-a-half hours.

"There's probably twice the minutes of score than I've ever delivered," Tyler reveals. "It was like writing music while staring into a firehose – the cut of the film changed almost daily, and our music had to align perfectly."

Then there are the other songs on the soundtrack. One is a punk cover of Martha Reeves & The Vandellas' *Nowhere To Run*, with Tyler's daughter Lola Colette on vocals, while another drafts in In This Moment.

"I've done a couple of tracks virtually with Maria [Brink, vocals] in the past [including *Meet Me In The Fire*, from DC Comics' *Dark Nights: Death Metal*, and last year's *Blood 1983* EP of reworked songs]. This was our first time getting in the room together, and they had an idea for a song and I loved it," explains Tyler. "I wasn't thinking of it for *John Wick* at first, but then I thought, 'Well, this song *is John Wick*'. Everything that Maria is saying in the song aligns with the same values that John Wick possesses, the same motivation. So I thought that was very interesting. But, you know, I can't say exactly what the context of the song in the movie is, of course, but I'm so thrilled that they're involved."

As a producer and composer, Tyler has a knack for amplifying other people's voices. Whether that's producing LA rock'n'roll quintet Starcrawler's latest record, his daughter Lola's debut EP, or Jerry Cantrell's *Brighten*, Tyler's job is "helping people tell their stories".

JOHN WICK 4 STILL: MURRAY CLOSE/LIONSGATE. TYLER BATES: JIM LOUVAU

Tyler Bates: composer extraordinaire

"Stepping into the spotlight is fun, but it's more disciplined to fine tune someone else's music," he reflects. "Every piece of work is a committed labour of creative love. No matter what the project is, I give a part of myself."

From the quietly tense sounds captured on 2005 police procedural *Criminal Minds*, to the diverse, acid rock-infused sound explored on Netflix's new animated venture, *Agent Elvis*, Tyler learns something new from every assignment.

"Each project forces me to grow," he explains. "The goal is to create a score that serves the movie while still being personally connected to the director."

Choices like bringing Chelsea Wolfe onboard for A24's psychological thriller *X*, directed by Ti West, highlight his perceptive nature. Ti trusted him to score its prequel, *Pearl*, and now final part *MaXXXine*.

Between his everyday work and his extra-curricular activities as a musician – right now he's playing guitar on tour with Jerry Cantrell – Tyler has plenty of projects to sink his teeth into, but admits *John Wick* holds a special place in his heart.

Originally pitched to Tyler as a "little indie action movie", the series has grown exponentially under the stewardship of stuntman-turned-director Chad Stahelski.

"There are no directors that are more experienced and qualified to create something like John Wick," Tyler says. "Chad's a master in martial arts – and, while it's a fun, sort of graphic novel aesthetic, at its core, it's very authentic. *Chapter 4* is just crazy... and I thought the *last* film was crazy!"

***JOHN WICK: CHAPTER 4* IS IN CINEMAS NOW**

LIZZO: GETTY

10 THINGS WE LEARNED THIS MONTH

What's been blowing our tiny brains

LIZZO LOVES RAMMSTEIN

The pop star briefly covered *Du Hast* on her recent tour through Germany.

...BUT DEMI LOVATO IS STILL POP'S BIGGEST METAL FAN

Her new single, *Still Alive*, was co-written by Mike Shinoda, who stars in the video alongside Ice Nine Kills' Spencer Charnas.

WE ARE GETTING MORE BEAVIS AND BUTT-HEAD

Season 2 of the rebooted *Beavis And Butt-Head* is set to air from April 20.

BARNEY GREENWAY IS UNSTOPPABLE

Despite breaking his ankle onstage, the Napalm Death singer has forged ahead with the band's UK tour.

Lizzo embraces her inner Till

MODERN TEENS DON'T UNDERSTAND LIMP BIZKIT

The latest REACT video on YouTube saw teens getting all kinds of confused by the nu metal superstars.

PLAYING WITH SLIPKNOT IS "LIKE JUMPING OUT OF AN AIRPLANE"

...according to drummer Jay Weinberg anyway. Is that with or without a parachute, Jay?

MÖTLEY CRÜE AREN'T CALLING IT QUITS ANY TIME SOON

Nikki Sixx reckons the band will be touring until "at least" 2031.

MARY ON A CROSS HAS GONE SILVER IN THE UK. HOLY CRAP!

That's the equivalent of 200,000 sales for Ghost's viral B-side.

ARCHSPIRE FANS LIKE TWISTER

The band got people playing it during a gig. We've heard of throwing shapes in the pit, but that's ridiculous...

MERCH PRICES ARE GETTING CRAZY

An online snap of merch prices for Gojira's latest tour has prompted serious debate on what it takes to survive as a band in 2023. Read what Joe Duplantier has to say about it on p.48...

JESSE LEACH

The Killswitch Engage frontman talks double-denim, second chances, and finding healing through 'vision quests'

WORDS: PARIS FAWCETT

IN THE EARLY 2000s, Killswitch Engage helped revitalise a scene that was growing restless with nu metal. They became figureheads for the New Wave Of American Heavy Metal and inspired a generation of metalcore bands that continue to thrive today. Frontman Jesse Leach departed just as the band exploded after 2002's *Alive Or Just Breathing*, but made a triumphant return a decade later and has carried the band to new heights ever since. So what better way to celebrate the band's enduring legacy than letting you loose to ask him questions about psychedelics, double-denim and the drunkest rock stars he's ever seen?

The New Wave Of American Heavy Metal: actual scene or a load of media bollocks?
Rory Atkins, Twitter
"I think those things were happening whether or not you want to call it the New Wave Of American Heavy Metal, which is a term I still don't understand. It didn't matter if you gave it a name or not. The shows were packed, the bands were exciting. I think because of the label, people were able to latch onto it and it did help the momentum of the music… I hate to say it, but it did help to get a soundbite and give it to people to understand that this is happening. It's not just Iron Maiden, Motörhead and Metallica, there's something new going on here."

You often undertake 'vision quests' where you go into the wilderness. What's the most insightful revelation you've had?
Dan Beard, Facebook
"It's hard to put those things into words. It's not just a message you get, it's a shifting of consciousness. But I would say the overall theme that I have gotten is how we need to keep our ego in check. They call it ego death and when you realise that you are part of a much greater energy, that you're not above or below, we're all on this same playing field. I think everybody could use a heavy dose of going out and being one with nature. People always think that's so cheesy but our ancestors were all partaking in things like this. All our ancestors had these spiritual tools. Communicating with nature and partaking in the substances which nature provides us with, whether that be mushrooms or ayahuasca… Vision questing is very much a part of that – finding purpose and your calling in your life, killing your ego and being humble."

You got engaged recently. What song will you have as the first dance at your wedding?
David Paxton, email
"A song that's been becoming one of our songs is by this band called Mutemath. They have a song called *You Are Mine* and it's just beautiful. The lyrics are incredible, it almost skirts the line of creepy because it talks about possessing somebody, like obsession with somebody, but it's beautiful. Love should be a little crazy. Tame love is great, but I think a little bit of intensity and excitement added onto your love keeps the flame going."

Jesse described Killswitch Engage as "five very opinionated men"

Are you currently writing new Killswitch material?
Adam McCann, Twitter
"Yeah, I've been at it for weeks. It's been a long time in the works and we've been quiet about it. I'm really being picky and extra careful not to repeat myself lyrically so it's been quite a challenge, but I think that's what we should be doing at this stage in the game. Making sure that we're putting out something that's exciting, fun, new and fresh."

***Hammer*: If you're writing now, will we get new music by Bloodstock?**
"It all falls on my shoulders. If I come up with demos good enough then we move forward, if not then it's gonna take longer. If I had to throw out an idea, I'd say it will be another year before they see the light of day. [As for Bloodstock] I don't know, that's to be seen. I think it's always good for bands to put out singles and tease the new record if it's done. I'm game for that completely, but I'm one of five very opinionated men so it depends on what the majority think we should do."

Do you think we'll get any music from your other projects next year?
Anthony Varesi, Facebook
"I have no time. Where I'm at now, Killswitch is my No.1. Times Of Grace put out a record we were never able

PRESS

“I HAVE AT LEAST SIX OUTFITS THAT ARE FULLY DENIM!”

Nature boy: the wilderness plays a huge role in maintaining Jesse’s mental health

to tour on so we really want to try and get out and maybe do a few dates on that. There's talk on the five-song EP that we've been holding onto; it may very well see the light of day next year if we do some shows, but as far as me tackling any new projects or doing anything besides Killswitch, I just don't have time for it. And when I do finally find time, I want to focus on some solo stuff I've started, which is a complete departure from anything I've known."

What's the best hardcore song ever written?
HeIsWill, Twitter
"Sick Of It All's *We Stand Alone*. That song encapsulates why I love hardcore and punk. It's a total protest song. When I was younger, looking for my identity, I didn't fit in with the mainstream, I didn't fit in with the cool kids, I didn't fit in with all these people… Sick Of It All were one of those bands that made me proud. That song was all about standing on your own – you don't need help from anybody or society, you don't have to follow all the laws that they throw at you, think for yourself."

What was it like playing the Roadrunner United live show with Killswitch in 2005 while also on hiatus from the band? What were the highlights?
Alice Barley, Twitter
"The highlight was just getting to hang out with the Killswitch guys again. Before the show, I met them at a bar, just hanging out and having a good time. After *Alive Or Just Breathing* came out I went MIA, so to see an audience singing along, and to be backstage with people I considered my peers telling me I did something worthwhile, that really stuck with me and altered the way I felt about my music, because I was not in a great place at that point."

Did you get to party with the other bands at the Roadrunner United show? Which band gets the drunkest?
Ashley Friar, email
"I'd say Brian Fair from Shadows Fall, who headbanged and fell offstage because his dreads were so heavy and he was drunk. Him and the 36 Crazyfists guys would take the cake for most drunk. I've never seen anyone that drunk in my life. I love those guys but they were probably the most fucked-up I've ever seen anyone."

"LOVE SHOULD BE A LITTLE CRAZY"

Jesse has solo stuff in the pipeline… but don't worry, he's staying with KSE

Who would have been on your Roadrunner United team back in the day?
Marc Sullivan, Facebook
"Mikael Åkerfeldt from Opeth – he's one of the most prolific writers to this day in metal. Then Zakk Wylde for sure. Martin Lopez, who was the drummer in Opeth, was incredible. And I'd have to throw in Adam D. He's only known for his work in metalcore but he is a prolific musician and I think he'd add a lot to that line-up, not just because he's one of my musical soulmates but he's incredible, he's a genius."

***Hammer*: Who would you have now?**
"Gojira. Done. Gojira can take care of it."

On a scale of 1–10, how much does Adam D's goombah-ing around onstage get on your nerves?
Daniel Millar, Twitter
"It depends on the night. For the most part he makes me laugh because he is hysterical. But there are times when I'm in a real heartfelt moment, or I'm connecting somehow with the audience and trying to be heartfelt and he'll come in and bludgeon me with a dumb joke. I think the bottom line with Adam is that people really know who he is. He's a sweetheart but when he gets onstage that persona takes over and he loves it, it's punk rock for him. When I first rejoined it was a little difficult for me because I take what I do seriously – sometimes too much. But at this stage in the game that's who Killswitch is, that's part of our identity. If Adam isn't doing shit like that it feels weird."

How many full denim outfits have you got?
Robin Maes, Facebook
"Most of my wardrobe is denim. There is something comforting about denim, I don't know what it is, man, it just reminds me of growing up in the 80s where denim was king. My dad was an ex-hippie rocker who always wore denim. It just reminds me of rock'n'roll and working with my hands and splitting wood. I have at least six outfits that are fully denim!"

KILLSWITCH ENGAGE PLAY BLOODSTOCK ON AUGUST 11

PRESS

When a Hero rises anew, a Legend is born – ANGUS McSIX rises from the Dead!

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THE SLAYLIST

MIYAKO

She's a power metal powerhouse, but Lovebites' shredder has been inspired by everyone from Polyphia to Elton John

WORDS: RICH HOBSON

Miyako won't be smashing up her guitars any time soon

"METALLICA'S *MASTER OF PUPPETS* is the first metal song that I learnt to play from beginning to end. Those riffs had me hooked! It made me appreciate how great James Hetfield's downpicking is… my arm would be so tense that I'd get serious muscle pain the following day! **DEEP PURPLE**'s *Burn* is a classic, but it's difficult to play. I really like the tone of Ritchie Blackmore's Stratocaster. I used to think, 'I want to be like Ritchie!' but then I saw he'd smash up his guitar onstage and I thought, 'Nah, I can't be like Ritchie, I'd feel too sorry for the broken guitars!' I also think the presence of two legendary singers, David Coverdale and Glenn Hughes, really elevate this song to another level.

"**ALL THAT REMAINS**' *This Calling* is the track that made me pay attention and think, 'Metalcore is cool!!' I remember going to see them when they came to Japan in 2011 – I was so impressed by Phil Labonte's ability to transition between growling and clean vocals – I couldn't take my eyes off him the whole time. That was also the first time I saw a foreign band live in Japan. Before Lovebites formed, I went to see **UNEARTH** in Japan and I have a fond memory of chatting with guitarist Ken Susi at a nearby bar afterwards. When I got a seven-string, *My Will Be Done* was the first song I learnt to play. I remember focusing so hard on the sweeping phrase at the start – I think this track is where my habit of adding tapping has come from.

"When I was a kid, my mum would have *Thriller* playing at home, along with many others by **MICHAEL JACKSON**. In fact, if you listen closely to some Lovebites songs, you might be able to hear his influence. The guitar riffs throughout *Thriller* are simple, but so memorable – Eddie Van Halen's phrasing in the solo is so cool! My mum also used to listen to **QUEEN**'s *Bohemian Rhapsody*. The way the bandmembers' vocals are layered is truly beautiful and it makes me want to write operatic songs like his. Freddie Mercury as a pianist has also had a big impact on me. Actually, I went to see the *Bohemian Rhapsody* movie many times at the cinema, and I cried every time…

LISTEN NOW
To hear Miyako's choices, head to tinyurl.com/LovebitesSlaylist

"I SAW THE *BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY* MOVIE MANY TIMES AT THE CINEMA, AND CRIED EVERY TIME"

"Everything about **DREAM THEATER**'s *Metropolis Pt. 2* is so beautiful and artistic – the whole album plays out like one big song! It's what got me listening to prog metal. I use John Petrucci's signature Cry Baby wah pedal, and I also play piano and keyboard, so naturally I have respect for Jordan Rudess too. There is no doubt that Dream Theater have massively influenced me, both on guitar and the way I play keyboard. **POLYPHIA** play so well! *Champagne* is not the easiest song to play along to, but the nuances of the guitar have left a big impression on me and I implement them in my own playing. It takes my breath away they're able to emote so many feelings just from their guitars. For example, they show that you don't need distortion and to play hard for a piece to be intense. Amazing.

"I heard *The Power Of Love* by **HUEY LEWIS & THE NEWS** in *Back To The Future* and thought it was so cool. I listen to it while walking or when I'm a bit tired but I have to go somewhere, and it instantly gives me the energy to get going. Huey's voice rocks and is so unique! It reminds me of the importance of a vocalist's natural voice. I think our vocalist Asami also has a powerful and unique voice! I came across **ELTON JOHN**'s *I'm Still Standing* for the first time in the film *Sing*. It has a lot of great songs from a number of genres, but *I'm Still Standing* really stood out to me. It cheers me up the moment I hear it. After this I started listening to more songs from Elton John. He's another one-of-a-kind vocalist!" MH

***JUDGEMENT DAY* IS OUT NOW VIA JPU RECORDS**

PRESS

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LIFE LESSONS

MANUEL GAGNEUX

A student of Basel's Satanic and punk rock undergrounds, the Zeal & Ardor leader has a degree from the school of hard knocks

WORDS: MATT MILLS • PICTURES: DEREK BREMNER

ZEAL & ARDOR may be a young band in the grander scheme of black metal, but mastermind Manuel Gagneux has already led a story-filled life growing up in the colourful city of Basel, Switzerland. Before debut album *Devil Is Fine* stunned with its fusion of heavy music and slave spirituals, he was jamming in disused bunkers, garrisoned with dumbasses in the Swiss Army and watching bands stab themselves with tattoo needles. Here's some of his hard-earned wisdom.

PARENTS AREN'T PERFECT

"My mum told me this story where she and my dad were in New York. They walked by a restaurant and my dad would just grab food off other people's plates as they went by. I guess it was a weird move to impress my mum."

STAY IN SCHOOL

"The education system was a big argument [for us living in Switzerland]. My parents didn't want me and my brother to go to American schools, I guess because the quality of the curriculum here was more compelling. So, we went to Swiss schools – which I didn't stay in."

RACISM BAFFLED ME

"My earliest memory of racism is when me and my mum went to the supermarket. I must've been seven. This woman started yelling at us, 'Get out of here! Get out of this country! I can't believe they let you into this store!' I wasn't scared; I was confused, like, 'How? Why?' It didn't occur to me that it was racism because it was so outside of normalcy for me."

I WAS NOT A BORN SINGER

"When I was 11, I got an Offspring CD for Christmas. It had the lyrics booklet and I'd sing along, having never heard the songs before. I was winging it. My mum opened my door and went, 'Never do that again, please.' Ha ha!"

YOU CAN BE INSPIRED BY THE SIMPLEST THINGS

"There was a huge squatting and punk scene in Basel. I saw my friends play onstage and went, 'Hang on. These are people I know! What the fuck are they doing here? Wait… you can just do this?! That's amazing!'"

CHECK WHERE YOUR FOOD COMES FROM

"There was a venue in Basel called The Villa. It was a 'spite home', from when there was some industrial building going on and someone just didn't want to sell that particular piece of land. It was in the middle of a chemical plant or some shit. If you played there, they'd make you food, but they scavenged it from dumpsters."

KNOW WHERE TO DRAW THE LINE

"Tat2noisact was the name of a band I saw in Basel. They did this rather striking performance where the singer had this line [tattooed down his body] and one half of him was, just, doodled. As he's singing, another person is stabbing him with a tattoo gun. Blood was involved. It wasn't this nice, 'Oh, he's getting a new tattoo'; there was a stabbing motion. The buzzing sound was amplified. It's hard to forget that performance."

YOU HAVE TO START SOMEWHERE

"My first black metal band was just two 16-year-olds in a bunker. Switzerland has bunkers everywhere, and these bunkers have water tanks attached to them. We found one of the water tanks empty. It was this decently sized cavity but the acoustics were horrible and the air quality was bad. We probably shouldn't have lit as many torches in there as we did. Ha ha!"

DON'T POINT A GUN IN YOUR OWN FACE

"I joined the Swiss Army at 20. There was this one guy who was not smart. The first six weeks, you do basic training, so everyone has a gun. Before they give you a uniform, they give you a gun. It was fucking wild! The first time we get ammunition and are about to shoot shit, he looks down the barrel to see if the bullet is in it. At that point I figured, 'This is a bad endeavour.'"

BE HUMBLE; BE ORIGINAL

"I was 22 when I went to live in New York. There was a culture shock, but in a good way; when you're in New York and you think you're good at something, you can be certain that there's someone in the same city who does it much better. That forces you to be humble and then be original."

THE FIRST ZEAL & ARDOR GIG SUCKED

"At the first Zeal & Ardor show, I was also the sound guy, because the guy who organised it couldn't find a sound engineer. I think it was Greenleaf, a stoner rock band, playing and I was in way over my head. They had an in-ear system. They'd ask about the monitor and I'd sweat bullets and Google, 'What is a monitor?!' Ha ha ha! I did my set in the basement, for some reason. It was me with a laptop doing impromptu karaoke, basically."

MY FAMILY SUPPORT ZEAL & ARDOR – BUT DON'T UNDERSTAND IT

"My mum's moved back to the US and she comes to our shows in the New York area. She always brings my aunt, who gives me that warm, supportive 'How nice.' Ha ha!"

DON'T BRAND PEOPLE

"We offered to brand fans at early Zeal & Ardor shows. We built this branding iron and brought the Bunsen burner with us so we could heat it up. It was this art piece; we said, 'If you get yourself branded, you get merch for free,' but it was a commentary on blindly following people. If you blindly follow anything, you may as well get branded by it. That was my cool, edgy thought, but then people actually did it and I thought, 'Oh, fuck, this is getting out of hand!' It was set up with the idea that no one would ever do it. Eight people did."

SATANISM WILL ALWAYS BE COOL

"You don't get into black metal as a teenager without reading some sketchy books. It began there, I guess, and I never really quit. There's something compelling about secret societies and Satanism has that aspect to it. That's why people are obsessed with the Illuminati and the idea of obtaining secret knowledge – even if you got that knowledge from a book you bought, so it's probably not that secret. Ha ha!"

BEING A BUZZ BAND IS TOO MUCH PRESSURE

"Making [Zeal & Ardor's second album] *Stranger Fruit* was daunting because the sophomore album, when you have hype around you, is

“WE OFFERED TO BRAND FANS, AND THE IDEA GOT OUT OF HAND. EIGHT PEOPLE DID IT”

Thankfully Manuel's vocal skills have improved since his Offspring singalong days

"WHITE NATIONALISTS NO LONGER HIDE. THEY HAVE BUMPER STICKERS NOW"

go time. If you fuck it up, you could be gone for good. The sword of Damocles was over my head. It was a fight to prove that this wasn't a fluke. It was two flukes! Ha ha!"

SOME HISTORY LESSONS ARE DISTURBING

"A couple of years ago, I learnt about the Tuskegee experiments, where, in the city of Tuskegee, the Black community was given free medical treatment [from 1932–1972]. In fact, [the doctors] were just giving them syphilis to research an infected human body. It's super-fucked."

SONGWRITING CAN HELP YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

"Writing the *Wake Of A Nation* EP [featuring the song *Tuskegee*] was basically therapy, because it was in 2020 [after George Floyd's murder and during the widespread Black Lives Matter protests]. I was genuinely worried about my family in the US. I couldn't sleep. I had panic attacks. Just to get through that, I did really specific songs. In metal, you often have to feign aggression or sadness. That was not the case with *Wake Of A Nation*."

BLACK LIVES STILL MATTER

"Is the US safer for Black people now than it was in 2020? Absolutely not. I think people have gained confidence that they don't need to feign compassion anymore. You can just be honest about the fact that you don't care for a certain group of people. There are so many white nationalist groups now. They used to hide… now you can have bumper stickers."

ZEAL & ARDOR HAVE GROWN

"Our last record [2022's *Zeal & Ardor*], isn't 'black metal meets slave spirituals', but it's still marketed as that. That's a very specific niche of music. The playing field is so small, so there might be a finite amount of good songs you can get out of it. I don't know one person who just listens to one sort of music, so the idea that musicians only do one specific sort of music is just… how did that happen?"

DON'T LIMIT YOURSELF TO ONE MEDIUM

"I'm currently doing music for two films. I don't want to say too much and get in trouble, but both have an orchestral aspect to them. It's fun that I get to conduct. They're closely knit to the Zeal & Ardor project."

ZEAL & ARDOR WILL HEADLINE THE SOPHIE LANCASTER STAGE AT BLOODSTOCK ON AUGUST 12

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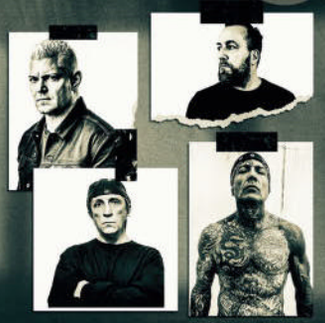

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IN THE STUDIO

THE ACACIA STRAIN

The deathcore innovators are making a grind- and doom-inspired concept double-release

WORDS: MATT MILLS • PICTURES: MIKE MULHOLLAND

The Acacia Strain: seeing double

DEATHCORE'S MOST SURPRISING band are at it again. Four years after dropping *It Comes In Waves* unannounced and three after releasing *Slow Decay* as a series of seven-inches, The Acacia Strain are back with two albums due out on the same day: *Step Into The Light* and *Failure Will Follow*. What's more, it's a concept piece: the former is grindcore, while the latter is composed of three 20-minute-long doom songs. We sat down with lead singer Vincent Bennett to figure out how they broadened their creative horizons yet again.

Two albums! What inspired this?
Vincent: "We've got to the point where we can never do anything normal ever again when it comes to record releases. We went, 'OK, we did *It Comes In Waves* [as a surprise release] and *Slow Decay* [as five seven-inch singles], what are we gonna do next to top or equal them?' Then a shower thought came to me: 'What if I took the lyrics to other songs that weren't recorded already and used them for other songs?' Then the idea of split timelines came about."

How did that feed into the concept?
"Our thinking was, what if there was a crossroads we took as a species that determined how we ended up, whether we evolve or devolve? So, one record is about us evolving and the other is us devolving."

Is *Step Into The Light* the evolution one?
"Yeah. It's about us surrendering our consciousness to whatever's next. The way humanity's headed, we can just devolve into cavemen again and end up beating ourselves up, or we can surrender to technology, upload our consciousnesses to whatever's there and leave our corporeal bodies behind."

Why did you want to use fast and slow to illustrate those two extremes instead of, say, loud and quiet?
"We wanted to do something that was still indicative of The Acacia Strain, so we didn't want to go pop. We didn't want to do, like, a pretty record. We wanted to do two really ugly records, just on different ends of the spectrum. That helps convey the message."

Did you write them one at a time?
"Both at the same time. For the most part, we'd write a song, then take the riffs and either speed them up or slow them down just to see if they'd work on the other record. We wrote more or less 75% of the record in the studio. It was fun to wake up and go, 'Fuck! We have to write three songs today!' It was stressful, but we worked well under the pressure."

Did you listen to any different influences for the fast and slow songs?
"Bongzilla and the Melvins were major influences, and a lot of new bands. A lot of people take influence from classic bands like Metallica and Pantera, but I'm taking inspiration from brand new bands. [California grindcore band] Scalp just put out my album of the year, *Black Tar*. There's a [deathcore] band called Volatile Ways from Australia. Why take inspiration from a bunch of old farts when there's new talent out there?"

Will the 20-minute doom songs ever get played live?
"I hope so! The ultimate goal is to play a set that's just three songs. On the flip side, we can play *Step Into The Light* and still have 40 minutes left. It's 22 minutes long. That was intentional: 'Oh, this song is two and a half minutes? Take a part out!' We wanted it to hit: no filler riffs. The ultimate goal is to do a tour where we're only playing the long songs and we're going to call it The Bummer Set. That's the kind of person I am now. When I was younger I'd mosh, but now I don't even want to stand up at a show. I'll find the spot near the soundboard, away from everything, and take it all in."

***STEP INTO THE LIGHT* AND *FAILURE WILL FOLLOW* ARE DUE OUT ON MAY 12 VIA RISE**

PRESS

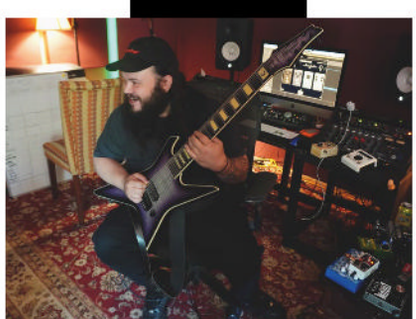
THE FACTS

ALBUM:
11 and 12

STUDIO:
Randy LeBoeuf's unnamed studio, New Jersey

PRODUCER:
Randy LeBoeuf

EXPECT:
One disc of grindcore thrashings and another of doom metal despair



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THE STORY BEHIND

HEY MAN NICE SHOT

FILTER

Richard Patrick's anti-suicide anthem launched his post-Nine Inch Nails career – despite being misinterpreted as a dig at Kurt Cobain's death

WORDS: MATT MILLS

Classic Filter (left to right): Richard Patrick, Frank Cavanagh, Geno Lenardo, Steve Gillis

GETTY

FROM 1981 TO 1987, R. Budd Dwyer served as the state treasurer of Pennsylvania. The Republican had been in his post for six years when he was convicted of accepting bribes from a computer company and awarding them a multi-million-dollar government contract. The day before his sentencing, he hosted a press conference where he refused to resign and proclaimed his love for his family… then shot himself, in public and on camera.

Footage of Dwyer's death was broadcast across Pennsylvania, and recordings of it became a mainstay of the 80s and 90s' most depraved tape-trading circles. Audio samples showed up in Faith No More and Kreator songs, while Neurosis's reissue of their debut album, *Pain Of Mind*, featured a still of his last moment on the cover. Richard Patrick was 22 years old when he accidentally viewed the clip, and at the time was the guitarist for industrial institution Nine Inch Nails during 1991's Lollapalooza.

"Me and my punk rock friends, we watched this collection of videos from this bookstore that was on Lollapalooza," the musician recalls. "Lollapalooza had this collection of crazy videos with all kinds of crazy stuff. The kind of things you'd find on YouTube if you looked them up, except there was no YouTube back in the day."

Talking with *Hammer* over the phone, it's clear, more than three decades on, how haunted Richard is by what he saw on tape. "At the very end of this one video, it showed the R. Budd Dwyer suicide," he continues. "The video footage is insanely graphic and it was horrifying to see."

As repulsed as Richard remains by that video, the twisted irony is that his post-NIN career took off because of it. Seeing Dwyer's death inspired the lyrics of *Hey Man Nice Shot*, the first single by his post-NIN project, Filter. The rumbling bass and chord-powered riffing, together with Richard's whispers and howls against suicide, gave a scene then addicted to industrial music a fix it craved. In the process, the band rocketed up the alternative charts, the song becoming a defining statement for his new band.

Almost 30 years later, *Hey Man Nice Shot* remains one of Filter's most renowned songs. At the time of writing, the track is creeping upon a total of 80 million Spotify streams, surpassed only by *Take A Picture* from 1999's *Title Of Record*. *Hey Man Nice Shot*'s mastermind has no false modesty over the fact that he created a hit. When we ask Richard why he thinks his song's resonated with so many people over so many years, he replies, "Because that guitar part is badass!"

"That chorus guitar part is the coolest drop D guitar part you can write," he continues. "I can't remember the guy's name, but he's got a big YouTube channel [Rick Beato, with 3.3 million subscribers] and I'm listed as No.10 in his video about the Top 10 drop D guitar parts."

Despite the pride he now radiates, Richard admits that whenh e wrote what's now hailed as a top-shelf metal riff, he "figured no one was going to hear it". He came up with the music in late 1991 and says that his goal was merely to convince his mates in his hometown of Cleveland that he was cool.

"They were just my punk rock skater friends that would skateboard around town, and we'd get drunk together, have fun, smoke weed and goof off," Richard recalls. "But they were also critical thinkers, critical of music at the time. They weren't into hair metal but they really loved Pantera, Ministry, Nirvana and The Smashing Pumpkins. I really appreciated who they admired musically, so I just figured that, if I could

THE FACTS

RELEASED:
1995

PERSONNEL:
Richard Patrick (vocals, guitars, bass, drums), Brian Liesegang (guitars, drums, keyboards)

HIGHEST CHART POSITION:
10
(US Alternative)

impress them, maybe that meant that I could impress more people."

Richard adds: "The other person in my life that I wanted to impress was Trent Reznor. I wanted my best friend to think, 'Hey, Rich has got some great talent too!' I wanted him to be like, 'Dude, I'm proud of you. You worked hard on this. This is good' – which is what he said."

However, before Richard started writing *Hey Man Nice Shot*, a conversation with Trent causeda massive chip on his shoulder. In September 1991, NIN had just finished what Richard dubs a "disastrous" European tour headlined by Guns N' Roses.

"It was after Lollapalooza: an alternative punk rock kind of festival with underground, alternative kids," he explains. "Meanwhile, Guns N' Roses had a heavy metal audience that weren't into our, pardon the expression, 'pussy shit'."

A band lunch in Paris at the end of the tour only furthered Richard's frustration. The touring guitarist lamented that he was going to move back in with his parents while Trent was about to rent a house in New Orleans so that he could create NIN's *Broken* EP. As Richard recalls, Trent unsympathetically responded, "Then get off your ass and write a record."

"I was shocked," says Richard. "But at the same time, I was inspired, because, well, you're goddamn right! You did it [with *Pretty Hate Machine*]; now it's my turn."

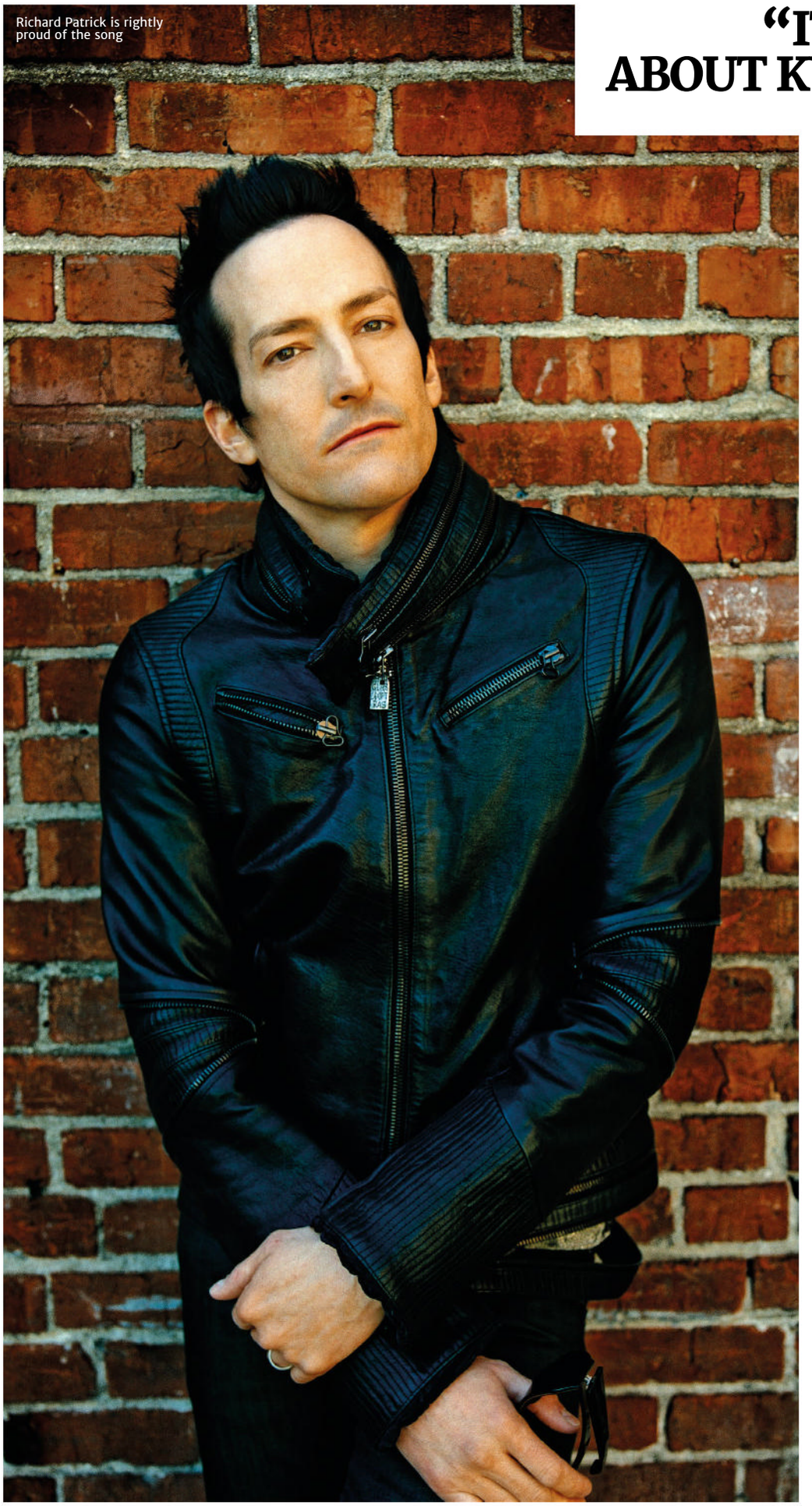
"I WANTED TO IMPRESS TRENT REZNOR"

RICHARD PATRICK

Driven to impress his boss and best bud, as well as his punk rock peers back home, Richard immediately holed up in his parents' beach house in South Carolina and composed *Hey Man Nice Shot*. The remainder of what would become Filter's 1995 debut album, *Short Bus*, was written between South Carolina, Cleveland and Los Angeles, where the musician travelled to help work on NIN's second album, *The Downward Spiral*. Richard formally left the band in 1993, during the making of *Downward...*, citing a need to express himself; he then co-founded Filter with his former band's programmer, Brian Liesegang.

Despite (and, ironically, contributing to) *Hey Man...*'s chart success when it came out as *Short Bus*'s lead single in April 1995, there was a hurricane of controversy due to the song's lyrics. Richard envisioned the song as an anti-suicide anthem, murmuring to Dwyer, *'I wish I would have met you. Now it's a little late.'* However, the words and sarcastic title were misconstrued as mocking Nirvana's frontman Kurt Cobain for taking his own life, an act that had broken the hearts of alternative music fans just 12 months earlier.

"There was a DJ in Seattle that said, 'This song is about Kurt Cobain'," Richard recalls. "But I have the copyrights to prove that it was written in '91. He was still alive and kicking



Richard Patrick is rightly proud of the song

"IT WAS NEVER ABOUT KURT COBAIN"

RICHARD PATRICK

ass! It was never about Kurt Cobain, and DJs all over the country started insisting that it was."

"The one thing that I made sure of was that [Nirvana's] Dave Grohl and Krist Novoselic knew I did not write it about Kurt," he continues. "I saw Krist at a festival in Seattle and told him, and I saw Dave at an MTV afterparty. Dave said to me that he had heard the song and liked it, but that his friends had told him, 'It's about Kurt.' Fortunately, he'd read a *Rolling Stone* article we were featured in, where we talked about R. Budd Dwyer. He told me, 'I believe you.'"

Only a year later, *Hey Man Nice Shot* entered the mainstream yet again, albeit for a much nicer reason. Director Ben Stiller had comically repurposed it to soundtrack a basketball scene featuring Jim Carrey and Jack Black in *The Cable Guy*.

"I thought it was hysterical," Richard remembers. "Ben Stiller's like a friend of the family, because he and my brother [the T-1000 Terminator himself, Robert Patrick] were friends. It was very cool that they used it, and they paid good money to have it in the movie. They really took care of me, and it was in a great part of a movie I appreciated."

Hey Man Nice Shot gave Filter's career a powerful start, propelling *Short Bus* to No.3 on the Billboard Top Heatseekers chart, with the album achieving platinum status in 1997. In September 2022, Richard brought his career full circle by performing the song with Nine Inch Nails at Riot Fest in Chicago. Today, he regards it as his quintessential hit, and while summarising his thoughts on it, he brims with pride.

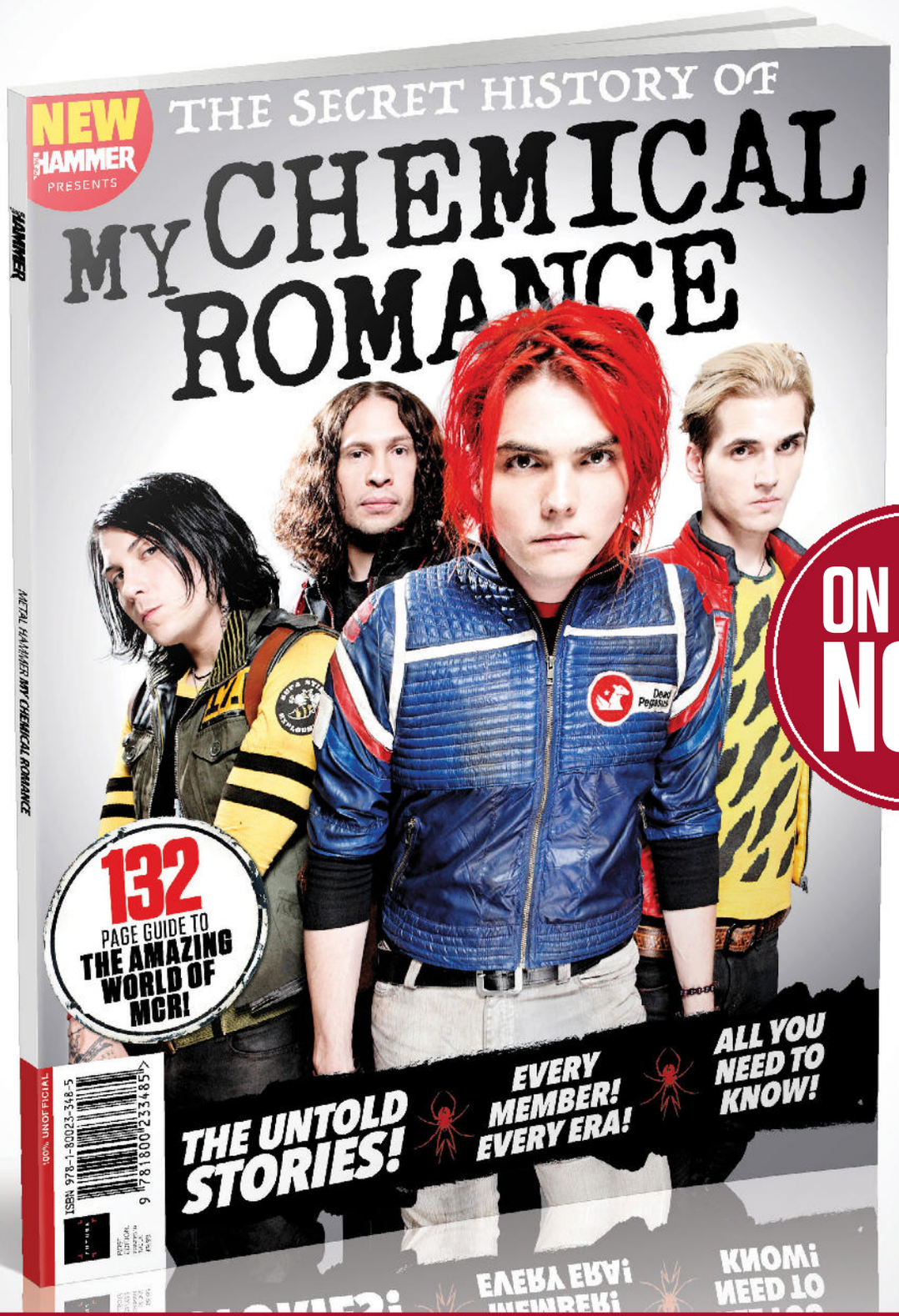
"At every Filter concert, every night, it's the last song that we play," he says, "because there's nothing you could play after it that could top it. It's like the Rolling Stones playing *(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction* or Stone Temple Pilots playing *Sex Type Thing*. After *Hey Man Nice Shot*, there's nothing we can do that's better than that."

FOR MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT IN THE UK, CONTACT SAMARITANS ON 116 123. IN THE US, THE SUICIDE & CRISIS LIFELINE IS 988. FILTER'S NEW SINGLE, *FOR THE BEATEN*, IS OUT NOW VIA GOLDEN ROBOT

PRESS

THE UNDILUTED STORY OF ONE OF ROCK'S MOST ICONIC BANDS

Covering every album, every line-up, every controversy and every story, this is the ultimate guide to MCR. From the Attic Demos and The Black Parade to reunions and rivalries, this book has it all.



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YOUR SHOUT

SABATON ISLAND? SIGN ME UP!

…and other such declarations, taunts and opinions you had to offer on our split cover run of Sabaton and Babymetal, plus recent features on Ville Valo, The Hu, Roadrunner United and more.

Sabaton: "cute", apparently

BLEATING ABOUT THE BUSH

Ville Valo talking about romancing sheep as he is about to start the UK leg [of his tour]. At least the man knows his audience.
Chris McGarry, Facebook

It was a little disconcerting to see how insistent you all were in pressing Ville for answers about his animal friend in that *Loveletting* video…

LOVE ISLAND

Sabaton Island?? Sign me up!
ArsenicMartini, Twitter

Considering the levels of ordnance the Swedes have to hand these days, perhaps territorial conquest was inevitable – still, we're not hearing any complaints here!

LORDI OF THE LOST

So happy to see Eurovision is embracing metal again. Aussies Voyager and Lord Of The Lost for Germany has me really excited (though a bit gutted it isn't Electric Callboy! Imagine – LOL!). Can we have a big *Hammer* feature on Eurovision now, please?
Louise Patterson, email

Erm, maybe. Though the competition has definitely had its metal moments, we're not sure there's enough for us to do a *big* feature just yet, but who knows… In the meantime, there's a lovely Big Picture in the front of the mag that should please you, Louise!

NO FOX GIVEN

Babymetal, give me a break.
Danielle, Twitter

They did, Danielle – a whole year, in fact! But now Babymetal are back and there's no stopping them – we suspect they'll be *everywhere* in 2023. You may as well surrender now. Sorry.

THE SUN NEVER SETS

Japan, Sweden, Austria – Jesus, I want to work for *Metal Hammer*. Are you lot ever in the office?
Tez, Twitter

Not when there's a wide world of metal to explore, Tez!

SPLIT DECISION

Both covers of *Hammer* are so cute, I can't decide!
Tanaka7744, Twitter

In the famous words of famous medical practitioner John A. Zoidberg, why not both? (Though we think this might be the first time anyone has ever called Sabaton 'cute'!)

THEY'LL NEVER SHOW THAT AGAIN

I remember getting the Roadrunner United album for Christmas when it came out, and being so excited about all my favourite bands collaborating. Why haven't they done it again? Great feature, btw.
Lauren Westbrook, email

We agree that Roadrunner United was incredibly special, Lauren, but as the feature shows there was a *lot* of work to make it come together. Still, we're only a couple years off another big

#TWEETS

Creed III had about 7 bangin' needle drops. My head was nodding hard throughout.
Doc Coyle, Bad Wolves (@DocCoyle)

Forget the myth of sex, drugs and rock n roll blah blah – the best bit of going on tour is when you stop at a big supermarket and buy lots of massive bags of crisps
Serena Cherry, Svalbard/Noctule (@whatacoolfridge)

Heartbroken that my only local music venue & greatest bar in town is being shut to build a hotel.
Milkie Way, Wargasm (@milkieway_)

Blood + Noise + Fire = Metal
Avatar (@AVATARmetal)

Lizzo covering Rammstein was not on my 2023 bingo card but damn I'll take it!!! Hell yeah go on @Lizzo
Nita Strauss (@hurricanenita)

STEVE BRIGHT

The Hu: pretty sure they could powerlift horses if they wanted to...

anniversary, so who knows what they have in store?

NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK

There's a lovely piece in the new *Metal Hammer* about Babymetal and their fans. It's almost entirely incomprehensible to me, and that's what I like about it: music as a life-giving club where true believers can be themselves and where oldies (hello!) just don't get it.
Carrieinglasgow, Twitter

Absolutely, Carrie – life would be so boring if everything stayed the same forever. Also, there's no such thing as an 'oldie'! Just older music and newer music – and we love it equally.

HORSE POWER

I misread the caption on the new *Hammer* [issue 372] cover under The Hu as "Powerlifting Horse Shenanigans" and it still made total sense. Sounds like exactly the type of thing one would do when rocking out to some Sabaton!
Steve Rubino, Facebook

Yep, there was definitely a lot of muscular energy in last month's issue – but don't overlook Babymetal on that front. That band are surprisingly powerful!

THE BIG DEBATE

Hollywood legend Jamie Lee Curtis suggested bands should start playing matinee shows out of consideration for older audiences. Though her choice of bands left something to be desired, we can't say we hate the idea…

THEY SAID

"Why are there no matinees? For instance, I love Coldplay. I would love to go see Coldplay. The problem is, I'm not gonna go see Coldplay if they start their show at nine o'clock and there's an opening act. I want to hear Coldplay at 1pm. I think if we filled a stadium with people who want to see a matinee of Coldplay, I think we could start a trend."

YOU SAY

If it's an indoor show, I guess that would be OK. But an outdoor arena? No thank you! I've seen Korn several times at outdoor arenas, and every time it was hot as hell!
Kelley Coyne Endicott, Facebook

Public transport finishes so early in the day in a lot of places, people would be more inclined to attend gigs if they could actually get home afterwards.
Venombullet666, Twitter

Perhaps if you're playing a venue for multiple days, but when are you supposed to load in and sound check? You only have the (rented) venue for so long.
William Bergel, Facebook

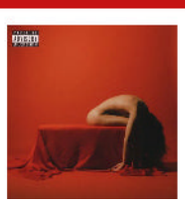
JLC obviously not having to ask a boss whether she can get time off on a Tuesday afternoon to see Anaal Nathrakh down the local working men's club…
Gavin McAllister, Twitter

I used to leave before the show was done to get home. If it started and ended an hour sooner I could see it all.
May Griffin, Facebook

JOIN THE BIG DEBATE AT FACEBOOK.COM/GROUPS/METALHAMMERREADERS

HAMMER STEREO

What's been blowing our office speakers



BAD OMENS
The Death Of Peace Of Mind
"Yeah yeah, this came out last year. But after seeing them live for the first time, it's back in my ears"
ELEANOR GOODMAN
EDITOR

GRAVE PLEASURES
Plagueboys
"Still a doomsday party, but it's now 4am, when all the really interesting shit happens"
JONATHAN SELZER
REVIEWS EDITOR

SOULFLY
Soulfly
"Revisiting this brilliant album. How the hell is it 25 years old this month?!"
VANESSA THORPE
PRODUCTION EDITOR

HUNDRED REASONS
Glorious Sunset
"It's so good to have Hundred Reasons back and what a glorious return"
LOUISE BROCK
ART EDITOR

ORPHANS OF DUSK
Spleen
"A blackened pearl of gothic doom brilliance filling the Type O-shaped gap in our lives"
RICH HOBSON
STAFF WRITER

METALLICA
72 Seasons
"Unknown metal band deliver impressive 11th album. They could go far"
DAVE EVERLEY
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

PRESS

NEW NOISE

ZULU

The boundary-pushing LA hardcore crew are blending brutal music with Black culture in the name of unity

WORDS: ALEX DELLER • PICTURES: ALICE BAXLEY

FOR DECADES NOW, hardcore's more progressive elements have talked a good game about inclusivity, equality and diversity. But despite the fundamental impact Black musicians have had on the genre (Bad Brains, Void, Swiz and Beefeater…) they remain sorely underrepresented – even as the genre has done better to embrace other underserved communities.

Thankfully, a new generation is putting the scene's money where its mouth is, from re-energising familiar sounds to rewiring genre tropes altogether. Rising fast among them are LA's Zulu, the brainchild of multi-talented frontman Anaiah Lei. Taking influence from powerviolence (a virulent form of hardcore that emerged in the late 80s/early 90s and distilled the genre down to its rawest, barest elements) while weaving in samples, spoken-word pieces and nods to the likes of Nina Simone, Bob Marley and Eddie Kendricks, Zulu offer both furious, skull-fracturing heaviness and an electric celebration of Black culture.

After two well-received EPs (both released by the UK's Quality Control HQ) the band are ready to drop their blazing debut album, *A New Tomorrow*, and it represents their boldest work yet.

"It took a lot of time just going crazy in my house trying to figure out how to put everything together," says Anaiah of the meticulous care with which the gut-churning riffs were spliced with soul, funk and reggae influences. "I need the sound to be an exact way, and I'll do whatever it takes to get to that point. Trial and error is a big part of Zulu, and it comes down to trying to make it cohesive and getting my point across. It takes a lot of time but it's fine because I love doing it – it's my favourite part about making music because it's so limitless."

'Limitless' is the best way to sum up Zulu's sound: a melting pot of influences and styles that's infinitely refreshing given how happy to rest on its laurels hardcore can often be. "It wasn't until we came to the LP and started diving into different genres that I saw this could go in any direction," says Anaiah. "I remember thinking, 'Are we really limited to genre?' All of us are excellent musicians, so why would we be?"

Despite this feeling that the band could go anywhere and do anything, Anaiah has no grand endgame planned. "I never had a beginning game," he laughs. "It'd suck if I did, because you don't stay the same person. From when I started writing *A New Tomorrow* to the end, I was two completely different people. I scrapped most of the lyrics because I wasn't in that place. I rewrote them to reflect my new headspace, and that just means anything's possible in terms of what the future looks like."

For all its stylistic pivots, *A New Tomorrow* is an undeniably brutal record when it needs to be. But while powerviolence bands of yore would typically steep themselves in the stink and misery of negative human experience, Zulu leaven their righteous fury at the systemic challenges faced by the Black community with glimpses of hope.

"I never wanted to be one of those bands with the scary image," says Anaiah. "If you want to be all skulls and daggers that's cool, but that's never been me. I wanted this band to be authentic to who I am. What does that look like? The artwork being colourful, the merch looking a certain way – everyone knows we make really cute, fun merch. And a big part of this record is very hopeful. It celebrates love and unity and peace and happiness. There's parts where it's on the other spectrum, but as a whole, that's the underlying thing. A lot of people come to this genre to express all the anger they have inside, and I've done that too. But I don't want to consistently do that. There's a whole other side to us as a band."

A sense of unity and cohesion is reflected across *A New Tomorrow*, both in terms of its intrinsic spirit and its uniting talented musicians beyond the core group. Members of Soul Glo, Truth Cult and Playytime guest alongside Aisha Burns and Precious Tucker, who contribute violin and piano respectively.

"I always want to support, lift up and involve other Black musicians when it comes to the art that we make," says Anaiah. "That's something I try to do as much as I can, because that's what the band is about."

As for the wider scene, does Anaiah see any improvement thanks to Zulu's growing prominence and that of other gatekeeper-unfriendly hardcore acts?

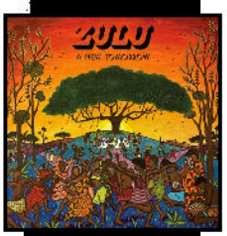
"It still has… I don't even want to say remnants, because that old mentality is a very prominent part of what's going on. It is changing, though. A whole new generation of kids are stepping into it. They're coming as they are, and being able to identify as who you are is definitely more accepted than it's ever been. So we do see that at our shows, and I think as a whole we see the scene getting better and better. There's still that ignorance, and it's still a problem. But it's getting dulled, which is good – it needed to go a long time ago."

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE: Socially conscious hardcore mixing bare-knuckle brutality with segues into soul, funk, reggae and rap

FOR FANS OF: Soul Glo, Despise You, Turnstile

LISTEN TO: *Fakin' Tha Funk (You Get Did)*



***A NEW TOMORROW* IS OUT NOW VIA FLATSPOT. ZULU PLAY OUTBREAK FEST IN JUNE**

Zulu are not limiting themselves to a single genre

"I ALWAYS WANT TO SUPPORT, LIFT UP AND INVOLVE OTHER BLACK MUSICIANS"

ANAIAH LEI

PRESS

NEW NOISE

BLACKGOLD

Mysterious masked nu metal revivalists who want to party like it's 1998

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL • PICTURES: REELZ

BLACKGOLD FRONTMAN SPOOKZ is enthusing to us about the quality of 90s music, over a Zoom call, when another figure steps into the room behind him.

"Who's that?" asks his girlfriend as she places a cup of tea next to the singer.

"It's *Metal Hammer*!" he calls back.

You might think this is an unnecessary detail, but Spookz is sporting a black-and-gold face mask that conceals his identity, and even the 'unintended' interruption of a cup of tea from Mrs. Spookz – we didn't catch her name – sees her pop up in a balaclava. Say what you want about the UK nu metal revivalists, they know how to leave a lasting impression.

"Metal has only got itself to blame for not being as big as it used to be," Spookz says. "When Slipknot and Limp Bizkit were first coming up it was larger than life and fun, but now it's all a bit serious. We're trying to bring that vibe back, because, let's be honest, it was the best."

Blackgold are certainly evocative of metal's most bonkers era. Spookz has a big, brash personality and their music is delightfully OTT, with phat riffs and crotch-thrusting grooves underpinning his bawdy, barrelling, hip hop-style vocals.

"People look down on this style," snorts Spookz. "But get 'em in a rock club and they can't stop but dance and sing along. That's what we want to inspire."

The band will have plenty of chances this year, as they are set to appear at Download in June and will also be supporting their idols Limp Bizkit on their upcoming UK tour.

"I can't wait!" Spookz enthuses, bouncing around on his chair. "They're the band we all look up to. We can't wait to get in front of that crowd and show them what we're made of. We have big plans…" MH

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE: Nu metal at its most obnoxiously, unapologetic catchy best

FOR FANS OF: Limp Bizkit, Hollywood Undead, (Hed)pe

LISTEN TO: *I Ain't Goin Out Like That*

***EP2* IS OUT ON MAY 5. BLACKGOLD SUPPORT LIMP BIZKIT IN APRIL AND PLAY DOWNLOAD FESTIVAL IN JUNE**

THOTCRIME

Hyperactive cybergrind pioneers hoping to make a digital buzz

WORDS: EMILY SWINGLE • PICTURES: VERONICA MULLEN WHITEHOUSE

THOTCRIME ARE DEVILISHLY unpredictable. Their latest album, *D1G1T4L_DR1FT*, is an outpouring of sonic disorientation, dead-set on giving you genre whiplash; one moment you're blasted with neon-spattered cybergrind, before suddenly being faced with Britney Spears dipping her toe into a pool of djent.

"Sometimes we'll be like, 'Oh, this section sounds like Napalm Death… what if we go into Skrillex?'" producer K. Salmon laughs. "If a track sounds like it's obviously building up to a mathcore climax, we'll cut to a hyperpop chorus – we'll do the total opposite."

Formed over Discord, the international collective's unabashed creative freedom oozes digital nostalgia. In the same way creatives flooded Myspace with genre-blind anthems back in the 2000s, whatever sound you're craving – be that sugary-sweet glitchpop, rabid metalcore or thumping, club-worthy EDM – Thotcrime have got you covered.

"We make a point to not be a 'meme band', but I love that we can be goofy," vocalist Hayleyy Sparxx tells us. "There's the tension built by spoken word… then we'll also have a dog bark that pans through your head before a breakdown. I love the juxtaposition."

"Even with tracks like *Central Dogma* – the left and right channels are never playing the guitar riffs at the same time," K. adds. "It's ping-ponging for the entire song, and feels like such a trip, like being in the middle of a warzone. With our music, it's got to be exciting – otherwise, what's the fucking point?" MH

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE: Gloriously glitchy Myspace-core, bristling with 8-bit breakdowns and cybergrind ferocity

FOR FANS OF: iwrestled abearonce, 100 gecs, The Callous Daoboys

LISTEN TO: *Rejection Sensitivity Dysphoria*

***D1G1T4L_DR1FT* IS OUT NOW VIA PROSTHETIC**

PRESS

TEN56.

Ultra-heavy metallic hardcore crew putting the world on notice

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:
Classic metalcore with no frills; melody and soft parts are replaced by pure aggression

FOR FANS OF:
Emmure, Alpha Wolf, After The Burial

LISTEN TO:
RLS

WHEN AARON MATTS left French metalcore veterans Betraying The Martyrs last year, he thought his career was over.

"I thought that just might be the end of me as a musician," he tells us. It was only a chance message from Uneven Structure drummer Arnaud Verrier that changed things. "He said he wanted to be in a jazz band," Aaron laughs. "I said, 'Why not just do a really heavy band instead?' it was only a joke, but he was into it."

The result is Ten56., a group that finally reflects Aaron's musical passion: music that is, first and foremost, heavy as fuck.

"I didn't want to be remembered as the guy who did the Disney cover [*Let It Go*]!" smiles Aaron. "This was always what I wanted to do. I love bands like Emmure, and I wanted to play in a band that really went for the heaviest thing possible. I'd tried to do it before, but this is the music I love."

So far, the reaction shows that fans of his previous work are well onboard, with Ten56. racking up more than eight million streams on Spotify alone – even though they have only released EPs thus far, with the latest, *Downer Part.2*, landing back in January.

"I've been blown away," Aaron says, puffing out his cheeks. "I've had so many comments saying, 'This is what we've always wanted to hear from you.' I really think this is the band I'll be remembered for."

***DOWNER PART.2* IS OUT NOW VIA OUT OF LINE. TEN56. TOUR THE UK WITH KING 810 IN APRIL**

EUPHROSYNE

Athenian post-black metal mixing savagery with heart

WORDS: ALEX DELLER • PICTURES: DIMITRI STZORTZIS

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:
A black metal smash-and-grab that isn't afraid to flex its jazz, pop or prog muscles

FOR FANS OF:
Deafheaven, Hexis, Oathbreaker

LISTEN TO:
When My Fears Conquered All

COMBINING SNARLING BLASTS of black metal, anthemic pop hooks and expanses of prog-informed ambience, Greek metallers Euphrosyne certainly aren't shy about mixing things up. What's startling, though, is how seamlessly it's all come together for such a young act: founding members Efi Eva (vocals) and Alex Despotidis (guitar) kickstarted the project in 2019 and only fleshed it out to full-band status in 2021.

"It may sound crazy, but everything came very naturally," says Efi of the effortless blend of sounds found on *Keres*, their debut EP. "The different musical genres we're into can certainly be a trap, because it's challenging to combine all the things you have in your head if you want to avoid it sounding like a mess. Though, now that I think about it, even this could have its charm…"

Despite being named after Greek mythology's female death spirits, *Keres* conveys a positive message about personal redemption and liberation.

"We want everyone to recognise their own fears, nightmares and visions through our music and face them," explains Efi. "We want them to know that we've all gone through the same things, and no one is really alone in this."

***KERES* IS OUT NOW**

IN THE KNOW

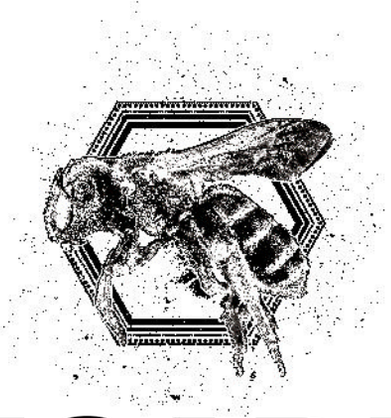
What your favourite bands are listening to

STATIC DRESS

"THEY ARE ABSOLUTELY killing it at the moment. Their vocalist, Olli Appleyard, is an absolute genius. When we talk about bands like Bring Me revolutionising the game… I think they might be one of those in a few years' time."

DANI WINTER-BATES, BURY TOMORROW

PRESS: DANI WINTER-BATES: DEREK BREMNER



HOARD ALMIGHTY

Box sets, underground oddities and all the essential merch you need this month

DIMMU BORGIR

PURITANICAL EUPHORIC MISANTHROPIA: VINYL BOX SET

NUCLEAR BLAST

£62

DOES NORWEGIAN BLACK metal *need* to be remixed and remastered? In 665 cases, no. But Dimmu Borgir were always different. Their fifth album, *Puritanical Euphoric Misanthropia*, was an overblown, sordid secretion of reach-for-the-stars maximalism, paving the way for even more bonkers escapades. It was also the full-time debut for Nick Barker on drums, Galder on guitars, and ICS Vortex on bass and vocals – a man whom they've had to replace with an actual orchestra since leaving. Basically, it was a blockbuster back then and remains so 22 years later. To commemorate such a landmark record, Nuclear Blast are peddling the 3LP, remixed and remastered edition. But it's not some crap cash-grab. Rather, it's an intricately detailed package, including classics like *Blessings Upon The Throne Of Tyranny* – and Twisted bloody Sister! – and a smattering of demos, rehearsals and pre-production tracks. Top kvality, that.

tinyurl.com/dimmu-box

MASTERMIND OZZY SHIRT

£152

Deep pockets? An undying love for Ozzy Osbourne? Then this shirt teaming him up with luxury streetwear brand Mastermind is for you. For this kind of money, though, we'd really expect him to personally gob a bat's head in our mouth.

tinyurl.com/ozzy-shirt

VENOM EIGHT-TAPE BOX SET

£120/£145

Experience the first four Venom albums, alongside EPs and rarities, in the same way as many an 80s metalhead: via the humble, flawed audiocassette. Also crammed into the lavish box are a book, patches, posters and many other assorted goodies.

tinyurl.com/venom-tapes

GG ALLIN THROBBLEHEAD

£67.50

Curious about a grown man shitting himself while playing low-quality punk? Nah, GG Allin's still naff. The late king of bad vibes is immortalised in thankfully silent, big-headed form, alongside his Murder Junkies bandmates. Buy it! You scum!

tinyurl.com/gg-throbble

HAMMERFALL VINYL

£44.99

Swedish power metal's played in arenas nowadays, but Hammerfall have been slogging away for ages. Their fourth LP, *Crimson Thunder*, celebrates its 20th birthday with a deluxe, bonus-tracks-and-kitchen-sink edition on steely grey wax. Underbar!

tinyurl.com/thunder-vinyl

OHHMS T-SHIRT

£16.99

Sludge, prog and spaced-out rock collide on *Rot*, the new album from Kent-sired riffmeisters OHHMS. Couple the tunes with this delish shirt, which pays homage (OHHMage?) to the album's EC Comics-inspired artwork.

tinyurl.com/ohhms-top

BOOK OF SHADOWS GRIMOIRE

£52.90

Looking for the perfect tome in which to inscribe your spells, potions and incantations? This – bound in leather, embossed with esoteric symbols and with optional vintage paper – will do the witch, wizard or warlock in you proud.

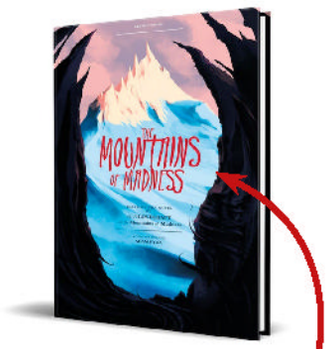
tinyurl.com/shadow-book

SLEEP TOKEN WINDBREAKER

£75

Preparing to get swept away by the imminent new Sleep Token album, *Take Me Back To Eden*? Just stick on this custom-made jacket, face the elements and make invocationary hand gestures at them, confusing everyone around you in the process.

tinyurl.com/token-breaker



THE MOUNTAINS OF MADNESS DELUXE COMIC

£7 - £188

This retelling of Lovecraft's classic horror is given the comic book treatment, bringing those unspeakable beasties to life in stunning, tentacle-y detail. Snag the PDF for seven quid, or splurge on a huge hardback bundle.

tinyurl.com/madness-deluxe

METEORA ANNIVERSARY HOODIE

£46.99

Linkin Park's second album might not have had the revolutionary impact of *Hybrid Theory*, but it was equally effective at channelling both your angst and need to throw mad shapes. Celebrate its 20th anniversary with this elegant item, with lyrics on the reverse.

tinyurl.com/meteora-hoodie

SERPENTINE WITCH KNEE HIGH SOCKS

£11.99

More interesting than your wacky office socks, right? Knee-high and sumptuously soft, these cotton/nylon/spandex puppies will keep your feet, er, supple. Maybe. And, as Till Lindemann so reassuringly said, one size fits all.

tinyurl.com/witch-socks

FIFTH ELEMENT STONES

£85

Bitch and moan about how movies were better back then, or do something about it – develop an insatiable lust for replica memorabilia. These handpainted, 1:2 scale stones from *The Fifth Element* should do the trick. All you need now is a match and a steady hand…

tinyurl.com/multi-stones

DEFILED T-SHIRT

£20.50

Take your mouldering pile of death metal t-shirts to the next level with this print-on-demand number from Tokyo's Defiled. We don't know what the skull-headed, big-handed entity on the front cover *is*, but, hey, it's still pretty cool.

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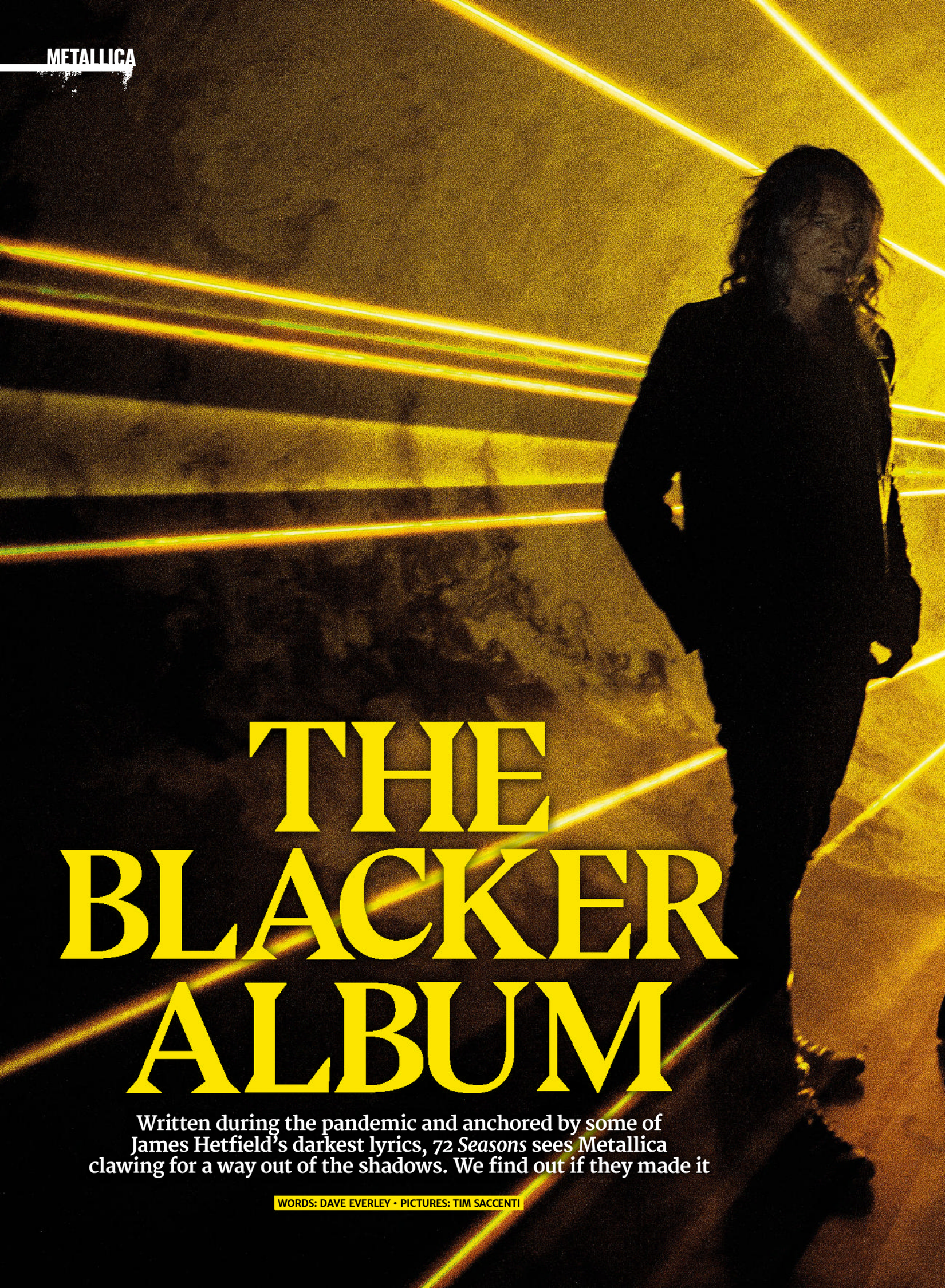

THE BLACKER ALBUM

Written during the pandemic and anchored by some of James Hetfield's darkest lyrics, *72 Seasons* sees Metallica clawing for a way out of the shadows. We find out if they made it

WORDS: DAVE EVERLEY • PICTURES: TIM SACCENTI

The day Metallica dropped *Lux Æterna*, Lars Ulrich couldn't help himself. He had to look at what people were saying about it online.

His curiosity was understandable. Released with zero warning on November 28, 2022, *Lux Æterna* was the first brand new Metallica song in six years, and a taster for their upcoming 11th album, *72 Seasons*. Big news by any measure, and Lars knew people would have opinions on it because everybody has an opinion on everything Metallica ever do. And they're not always positive.

"If you decide to go down into the comment sections, at least for me, you have to prepare yourself for not taking any of it overly personally," says Lars today. "You have to kind of remove yourself from it. But I'd like to challenge anybody in a band to say they don't look at comments."

And so the co-founder and drummer of the world's biggest metal band braced himself for a look into the bear-pit that is the internet to see what people thought of the song.

"I mean, I'm not sitting up until four o'clock in the morning scrolling through every one," he says. "But when you haven't put any music out in five or six years and you dump something like *Lux Æterna* on an unsuspecting world, you're going to want to see what the feedback is."

As it turned out, that feedback was largely positive and rightly so. *Lux Æterna* was three-and-a-half minutes of joyous exhilaration, a world away from the knotty complexity of 2008's *Death Magnetic* and the extended power-flex of 2016's *Hardwired... To Self-Destruct*. That it seemed to be a throwback to their debut album, *Kill 'Em All*, or even the earlier New Wave Of British Heavy Metal movement, only stacked things further in its favour (this is a comparison Lars has issues with, but more on that later).

"RECORDING GAVE US A PURPOSE IN LOCKDOWN"

LARS ULRICH

Two more defiantly forward-facing singles have followed since then: the raging *Screaming Suicide* and the self-lacerating *If Darkness Had A Son*. The gleaming, perfectly tuned Metallica machine, which in the last couple of years has been idling in the background while the band themselves focused on writing, recording and generally dealing with a global pandemic, is roaring into life. Except the Metallica machine maybe isn't quite as gleaming or perfectly tuned as you'd imagine.

"We're fumbling along trying to figure out how to do things the best we can, just like everybody else," says Lars with a laugh. "We're sitting around on Zoom calls going, 'Uh, how do we do this, how do we do that?' Metallica is just as gaffer-taped and jerry-rigged and clusterfucked as everything else."

It's a late February evening when Lars calls *Metal Hammer*. This is only the second interview he's done for the new album at this point, and he's still getting his head around the idea of what he's talking about. "I don't know what's fucking up, down or sideways, to be honest with you," he says breezily.

James Hetfield: comfortable enough to open up to his bandmates

When Robert Trujillo calls a few days later, he's in pretty much the same boat. Metallica's bassist of 20 years admits he didn't even know that *Lux Æterna* was dropping when it did.

"I started getting texts the next morning from friends: 'Wow, the new song's amazing, the video's awesome,'" he says. "I didn't even know that the song was coming out. So maybe the success of keeping it a secret is some of the members not knowing."

No one has to keep it a secret anymore. *72 Seasons* finally arrives on April 14. Contrary to expectations raised by *Lux Æterna*, not to mention frontman James Hetfield's assertion that the album's title is a reference to how the experiences of childhood shape adulthood, it's no nostalgia trip. Instead, the 12-track album is a fearsome slab of metal that's both modern and timeless. Lyrically, at least, it's The Blacker Album: a 77-minute roar of torment, self-doubt, frustration, and, ultimately, hope.

"WE'RE NOT TRYING TO PRETEND WE'RE 20, 30 OR EVEN 40"

LARS ULRICH

This isn't the first Metallica album to be recorded in dramatic circumstances – *...And Justice For All*, *The Black Album* and especially *St. Anger* all had their share of tumult. But *72 Seasons* was made against a testing backdrop, not least a global pandemic. It's become a cliché to talk about 'lockdown albums', but that's exactly what *72 Seasons* is – albeit the biggest lockdown album of them all, a potential full-stop on an era that's hopefully vanishing in the rearview mirror.

"Recording gave us a purpose in lockdown," says Lars. "It was also a way to feel as though we were communicating with each other, and staying in touch, and trying to find some light in the dark. Feeling you could turn the energy and despair of those couple of years into something positive."

It's tempting to assume that bands start thinking about a new album as soon as the last one is sent out into the world, but that's not how Metallica work. Their creative process is long and meticulous, not so much a mad torrent of artistic energy as a series of randomly shaped pieces being constantly rearranged until they fit.

Each new creative cycle begins with Lars "riff-mining" through hundreds of digital recordings amassed of the band jamming in soundchecks and in the Tuning Room that's set up backstage at every gig. Ideas are funnelled into an A-list or B-list, or given five, four or three stars. There's no grand plan at this stage, no vision of how it will all shape up and fit together.

"I wish I could romanticise it, and tell you that we're sitting down and there's a destination, but it's basically just work," says Lars. "You write one song, then you write another song and eventually you've got an album."

Except there was one massive complicating factor this time around: Covid-19. Metallica hadn't even begun work on the new album when the pandemic hit and most of America went into lockdown, torching whatever plans they did have.

"We've lived decades upon decades of having schedules: 'OK, we're on tour for a month, we're doing this in six months, we're going in the studio in eight months,'" says Lars. "When you have the uncertainty of not knowing what any of it looks like, it takes your confidence away."

Kirk Hammett: 60 going on 26

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Lars Ulrich: embracing the clusterfucks

Things became a little less uncertain in May 2020, when James brought an acoustic version of *...And Justice For All* opening track *Blackened* to the table for the band to flesh out remotely.

"That was really the start of something," says Robert. "It forced us to fire up our home studios and get the machine going. After that it was like, 'Do we want to do another acoustic number?' And we all said, 'No man, everybody else is doing acoustic covers of their songs, let's write some original stuff. Let's do this.'"

Like every other band in the same situation at that time, they initially muddled through as best they could, jamming remotely with producer Greg Fidelman overseeing things. "Sitting in three different places on Zoom calls, trying to figure out what button to press and how shit works," as Lars puts it.

This went on for a few months. "I believe that challenge being presented to us helped spark that creative flame and create that hunger and desire to create," says Robert.

Lars is less diplomatic. "It was all a bit of a clusterfuck," he says cheerfully.

Things began to untangle themselves in November 2020 when the band convened at Metallica HQ in San Rafael for a livestreamed acoustic benefit show for their All Within My Hands foundation. It was the first time they had all been together since the start of the pandemic, and it gave them the opportunity to start playing the new songs in the same room.

"It's kind of funny, I saw some footage of that the other day – we all had masks on," says Lars. "It's definitely a lockdown record in that sense."

With restrictions easing, work proceeded cautiously but steadily. They took Covid seriously – especially the prospect of 'long Covid'. "You hear about this horrible thing where it affects your lung capacity for the next 10 years, so we treated it with the respect it deserved," says Lars. "Testing 37 times a day."

"I HAVE DAYS WHERE I FEEL LIKE A FUCKING IDIOT"

LARS ULRICH

Counter-intuitively, not being able to step out of the studio for any length of time wasn't helpful. Metallica have traditionally broken up recording sessions with bouts of touring or festival appearances to pull them away from the grind of "fucking sitting there with 17 different versions of some connecting bridge out of the third guitar solo" and give themselves perspective and focus.

"In my 20s and 30s, I was just so fucking instinctive and right," says Lars. "Everything we did, we never made bad decisions. Now, there's 10 different ways of doing everything. As your experiences increase, so do the options: "Hey, that's a great riff. What happens if it's a little slower? What happens if we change the key?' All of sudden you've got seven fucking versions of this riff, and you sit and spend a day on which one's better.

"When we're making *Ride The Lightning* and we've got to be out of the studio on Friday 28th, there's no option to record on the 29th, because you don't have the money," he continues. "So the record's done on the 28th. Nowadays, what are they going to do?" He laughs. "Throw us out of our own studio?"

Of course no one threw Metallica out of their own studio. Instead, they inched towards completing *72 Seasons*, finally wrapping it in late 2022.

"Making a record is just making 12,247 decisions in the space of 18 months, and you hope you've made more right ones than wrong ones," says Lars. "And even then, you won't know for sure for another few years because you're still high on the process."

One of the biggest frustrations Lars Ulrich has with himself these days is the amount of "future-tripping" he does. "I spend more time in the future than I do paying attention to my surroundings: 'What're we gonna do in 2026?' or whatever. I need to spend more time in the fucking moment."

The one place Lars doesn't spend a lot of time is in the past. Aside from the occasional necessity – listening back to a big reissue, say, or rehearsing old songs they haven't played in years – he's not given to nostalgia. This is why the reaction that greeted *Lux Æterna* – specifically that it sounded like a throwback to *Kill 'Em All* or the New Wave Of British Heavy Metal – niggles at him a little bit, despite his protestations that it doesn't.

"If you think that, there's absolutely nothing that I'm gonna do to talk you out of that," he says. "Please don't misunderstand or turn it into 'Lars Ulrich is pissed off at the comments', 'cos it's not that at all. It's just more this thing about the continuous referencing to other elements of either our own past or somebody else's past. I guess to me the most important thing is whether people like it or not. All that other stuff, I can't wrap my head around that so much."

Retro or not, *Lux Æterna* is one of the few consciously uplifting moments on *72 Seasons*. *'Anticipation in domination / A sea of hearts beat as one, unified,'* sings James at the song's start, evoking the celebratory, communal feel of old-school Metallica anthems *Hit The Lights*, *Metal Militia* and *Whiplash*. *'Never alone for the feelings alike.'*

It's not clear exactly what the inspirations for James's lyrics are, because at the time of writing this, he isn't doing any interviews for *72 Seasons*. This may be down to timing, or it may be a reluctance to rake over recent events in his personal life, including his return to rehab in 2019 and the announcement in 2022 that he was divorcing his wife of 25 years, Francesca, or older traumas such as his Christian Scientist upbringing and loss of his mother when he was 16.

It's not clear how much of *72 Seasons* is autobiographical, but it is apparent that the singer has reached deep inside himself when it comes to his lyrics. The band have said that *Screaming Suicide* "addresses the taboo subject of suicide," reframing teenage anguish through middle-aged eyes. Elsewhere, it sounds like he's drawing on his own experiences for *Chasing Light* (*'All the love a young one needs / Thoughtless elders destroyed'*), while *If Darkness Had A Son* sees him barking: *'Temptation leave me be!'* All this blackness makes the light, when it does come, shine doubly bright. *'Misery / She's not what I'm living for, no no!'* sings James at the conclusion of 11-minute closing track *Inamorata*, a flash of optimism and hope that turns everything that had come before on its head.

Lars says he isn't sure how many of the lyrics on *72 Seasons* predate James's recent personal issues. "But all the lyrics I've seen are new. It's not like song number seven is something left over from the *Hardwired...* album. Whether they were written five years ago or 10 years ago, I've never seen them before this record."

What do you hear when you listen to James sing these lyrics? He pauses to think.

"Vulnerability. Transparency. Acceptance and hope. Possibility. Redemption. I feel that they're very daring, I love the vulnerability, I love the fact that he's comfortable

"IT'S ABOUT MUSIC MOVING YOU"

Your guide to every track on *72 Seasons*

1. 72 SEASONS
The title track is a classic Metallica album opener: machine-gun drums, jagged riffs, James Hetfield spitting out terse, staccato stanzas. A relentless, thrashy song punctuated by bursts of melodies and a pair of killer solos, it's the charred objects on the album's cover brought to life.
Key lyric: *'Wrath of man / Thrive upon / Feeding on / 72 seasons gone'*

2. SHADOWS FOLLOW
James's howl fights against an insistent, serrated-knife riff as he filters youthful anguish through a 59-year-old mind, leaning heavily on tried-and-trusted wolf imagery in the process.
Key lyric: *'On I run, still my shadows follow'*

3. SCREAMING SUICIDE
Kirk's big, loping wah-wah introduces the album's second single, before James spits out his taboo-busting lyrics, articulating the emotions surrounding a sensitive subject without glorifying or sensationalising it.
Key lyric: *'Keep me inside / My name is suicide'*

4. SLEEPWALK MY LIFE AWAY
A jabbing bassline and a scything riff usher in a real-life-waking-nightmare lyric. With its mid-paced groove, epic chorus and dense gravitational field, it really wouldn't have sounded out of place on *The Black Album*.
Key lyric: *'Take a deep waking breath / Hope the blood arrives'*

5. YOU MUST BURN!
A hulking, heavy-duty rhythm propels a song that uses a witch trial as a metaphor for adolescent rebellion and the death of innocence.
Key lyric: *'Question yourself, you may learn / You are the witch, you must burn'*

6. LUX ÆTERNA
"A song about celebration, about good energy, about togetherness, about music moving you," is how Lars Ulrich describes the album's NWOBHM-echoing first single. Undeniably uplifting, and as such an outlier here.
Key lyric: *'Amplification lightning the nation / Never alive more than right here tonight'*

7. CROWN OF BARBED WIRE
More externalised angst, with James painting a vivid picture of a broken king surveying his ruined kingdom – adolescent torment set to awkward, thorny music.
Key lyric: *'This rusted empire I own / Bleed as I rust on this throne'*

8. CHASING LIGHT
Lars Ulrich's drumming leads much of *72 Seasons*, and nowhere more so than here. The call-and-response chorus features Robert Trujillo singing on a Metallica studio album for the first time.
Key lyric: *'Catch your fall / Lean on me / End it all / Lean on me'*

9. IF DARKNESS HAD A SON
With allusions to temptation, it's hard not to view this as James addressing his demons. Maybe, maybe not – but its relentless groove and Lars's restless drum barrage is inarguable.
Key lyric: *'If darkness had a son, here am I'*

10. TOO FAR GONE?
72 Seasons doesn't give up its melodic treasures easily, and one of its most memorable is buried in here, the album's second shortest song (4:34, if you're interested). *Too Far Gone?* has a sudden shift of gear that's disorientating but entirely welcome.
Key lyric: *'Am I too far gone to save? / Help me make it through the day'*

11. ROOM OF MIRRORS
There are echoes of *Disposable Heroes*' *'You will die when I say, you must die'* hook in the penultimate song's turbo-charged chug, and James sings *'broken, beat and scarred'* at one point, referencing the *Death Magnetic* track, though musically and lyrically it reflects the album's multiplicity of emotions.
Key lyric: *'Strip away the phantom fame / Exposing all the sides to see / The good and bad in me'*

12. INAMORATA
Inamorata is the album's 11-minute closing track: a brooding epic that unexpectedly breaks down halfway through and builds all the way back. After the emotional wringer of what came before, the song and album end on a much-needed glimmer of light.
Key lyric: *'Misery / She's not what I'm living for'*

sharing that side of what's in his head and what's coming out is very relatable for all of us. The lyrics all come from James, but we're all in a place in our lives where we're much more comfortable with who we are as people, and sharing and showing who we are. Not trying to pretend we're 20 years old or 30 years old or even 40 years old."

The perfect snapshot of the band Metallica are now versus the band they used to be – or at least the perception of the band they used to be – came midway through a gig in Belo Horizonte, Brazil in 2022. Addressing the crowd, James confessed to "feeling a little bit insecure, like I'm an old guy, can't play anymore". He revealed that his bandmates rallied around him backstage, giving him a hug and telling him they had his back if he was struggling.

"WE HAD A HUNGER AND DESIRE TO CREATE"

ROB TRUJILLO

At the end of this impromptu speech, Lars, Robert and Kirk congregated around the singer to give him another, more public group hug. When they were done, James addressed the crowd again: "I am not alone, and neither are you." It was an unexpected moment of vulnerability and emotion from a band not known for overt displays of either.

"There are times when you're not as comfortable being vulnerable and showing your insecurities, and all these things make you put on a harder shell," says Lars. "But certainly in our current frame of mind, we're very comfortable with things like that. We love each other and we respect each other and we admire each other."

Are you able to sit down with James and go, "Listen, I'm worried about you", or "I've been divorced, this is what it feels like to go through it"?

"We have those conversations using different words. But yes, we talk about stuff like that."

How's James doing now?

"He's doing great. Like all of us… Do I have my own worries and insecurities? Of course. I have good days, as a bandmember, as a parent, as a life-partner, a song, a friend. Then I have other days where I feel like a fucking idiot or a loser or my head is not screwed on straight, I'm an asshole or whatever."

In November 2022, a couple of weeks before *Lux Æterna* was released, Metallica played a relatively small-scale gig at the Hard Rock Live in Hollywood, Florida. The show was in honour of their early mentor Jon Zazula, aka Jonny Z, the man who founded Megaforce Records expressly to release *Kill 'Em All* back in 1983, and his wife Marsha, both of whom died during lockdown. Fittingly, the set drew exclusively from the band's first two albums – a rare nostalgia trip for Metallica.

"That was a lot of fun, but it was also very tiring," says Robert Trujillo. "It's full on. We're not 21 years old. We took it on, we had a good time. Limbs were sore the next day, the necks needed adjusting."

The pendulum is about to swing in the other direction. On April 27, Metallica kick off the massive M72 tour in Amsterdam. The concept is unique: two shows in every city they stop off in, with completely different setlists on each night ("No repeats," insists Robert Trujillo proudly). While regular breaks ensure it won't be quite as intense as the epic tours of old, it will still take them through to September 2024 as it stands.

Rob Trujillo: no longer in the dark

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Metallica have long been strict about doing soundtracks. So how did *Master Of Puppets* end up on *Stranger Things*?

Metallica used to have a blanket policy when it came to requests to use their music on TV and in movies. "We'd say no to everything," says Lars Ulrich. "Then a few years ago, we did a 180 – we basically said, 'Why are we not sharing our music? It should be out there. Stop being so fucking protective of it."

Since then, Metallica's songs have been heard in everything from TV show *Billions* to horror/comedy sequel *Zombieland: Double Tap*. But it was the inclusion of *Master Of Puppets* in season four of Netflix's *Stranger Things* that blew the doors wide open.

"*Stranger Things* was a cool show, we know about it from our kids, so when we got the opportunity, we said, 'Yeah, have at it'," says Lars. "And then it just became this cultural phenomenon."

The band had already seen how the show had propelled Kate Bush's 1985 single *Running Up That Hill* to viral success, but that didn't make the impact of *Master Of Puppets* – played in a climactic scene by beloved metalhead character Eddie Munson – any less surprising.

"It's a heavy metal song that's over eight minutes long, that was released in 1986," says Lars. "The fact that became a phenomenon in the summer of 2022 is pretty mind-blowing. It was totally unexpected to meet kids on the street and at gigs: 'Hi, I'm 10 years old and I saw you for the first time through *Stranger Things* and *Master Of Puppets*.'"

And what's next? More Metallica/TV and movie tie-ins? Maybe.

"Now we more or less say yes to everything," says Lars. "Within reason."

"I NEED TO SPEND MORE TIME IN THE MOMENT"

LARS ULRICH

"It seemed like a really good idea about a year ago," says Lars. "Now that we're getting close, there's part of it that's, like, 'Holy fuck, what did we just throw ourselves into?'" He says he's been putting in the hard yards in the gym: "I'm pretty much chained to my Peloton."

Neither Lars nor Robert will be drawn into details as to what the stage set will look like, beyond the fact that it will relocate the snake pit into the centre of the stadiums they're playing in, with all the engineering complexities that entails (where exactly do you hang a lighting rig from in a venue with no roof?). Similarly, they're keeping schtum about the setlist. "Will we play every song from this album?" says Robert evasively. "I hope so, at some point over the next few years."

This decision to scale things up rather than down is admirable given there are a couple of significant milestones on the horizon. In August, James Hetfield turns 60. Lars Ulrich hits the same age in December. Kirk Hammett reached that landmark last November.

"Surely there must be some mistake," says Lars drily. "When people turn 60, aren't they supposed to be old? I don't feel very old. I feel in some perverse way younger and more clueless than ever. But it is what it is. I'm accepting of the things you can't change."

He has an equally unconcerned response to the question of how long Metallica can carry on doing this at the level they do it.

"How long is a piece of string? If I keep sitting on that Peloton and everybody else stays in good shape, then knock on wood, hopefully a few years still. Look at the Stones. Look at McCartney."

And the chance of the gaps between albums becoming shorter?

"I don't know how possible it would be to make an album in a shorter amount of time."

Of course, this is Metallica, and no other band has as many hopes, desires and demands projected on them by its fans. And no one is as aware of this as Lars Ulrich.

"We do take it seriously and we do try to do the best we can," he says. "But as we get older, it doesn't feel like we're any closer to cracking the code on any of it than we were 10 years ago or 20 years ago or 30 years ago. I mean, you can romanticise about having to finish an album on the 28th of the month because you're about to run out of money, especially if you're sitting freaking the fuck out and trying to figure out what's up, down and sideways, but I guess at the end of the day, I wouldn't change a thing."

And so the Metallica machine moves ever forwards, as gaffer-taped and jerry-rigged and clusterfucked as it ever was. **H**

72 *SEASONS* IS OUT ON APRIL 14 VIA BLACKENED RECORDINGS. METALLICA PLAY DOWNLOAD ON JUNE 8 AND 10

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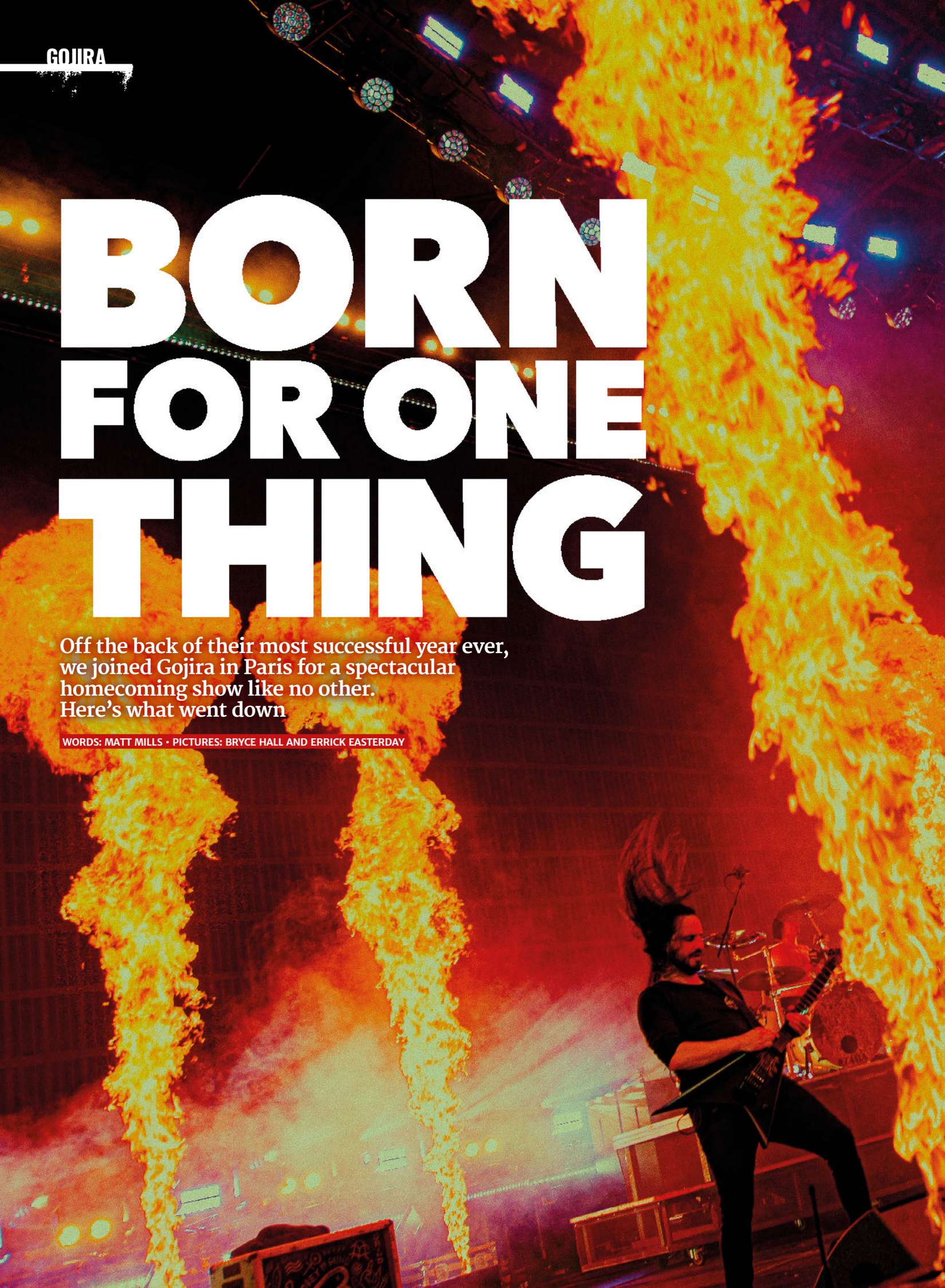
BORN FOR ONE THING

Off the back of their most successful year ever, we joined Gojira in Paris for a spectacular homecoming show like no other. Here's what went down

WORDS: MATT MILLS • PICTURES: BRYCE HALL AND ERRICK EASTERDAY



"OHHHHHHHHH! OHHHHHH-OH-OH-OHHHH! OH-OH-OHHHHH-OH-OHHHHHHH! OH-OH!" That's the melody 16,000 people are yelling in unison inside Paris's Accor Arena. It's as enthusiastic and awe-inspiring as the mass chanting at a football game, yet it's the sound of a death metal crowd.

Gojira have just finished their biggest-ever indoor show, on their first-ever headline arena tour, and they're standing onstage as a home crowd serenade them with the wordless hook of meditative song *The Chant*. They are speechless. Frontman Joe Duplantier is near tears.

Tonight is both well earned and long anticipated. The band have been working their way up metal's ranks since 1996, and announced this arena run in 2021, off the back of that year's beloved *Fortitude* album. Then Covid restrictions got in the way, meaning they had to push it back a year. Some bands would have been pissed-off about a situation like this. Not Gojira. When we chat to Joe and his little brother, drummer Mario, backstage before the show, they claim they were unfazed.

"Covid was a worldwide situation," Mario says, "so I can't really complain about it. You have to observe what's going on and not be an egotistical, selfish person saying, 'I want to play my fucking show!' We were super-chill during this moment."

We believe him. After all, Joe and Mario are hours away from the biggest gig of their lives, and they're chill as fuck. If there are any nerves or giddiness, they're buried deep.

"Our attitude, from the very beginning, has been: 'OK, we're a death metal band from a little town, but *technically* a show this big is possible'," Joe explains calmly. "We were always conscious of the fact that a mental attitude can either stop you from something or push you towards what you really want. When you project what you want out there into the world, you make it possible."

It's 1pm on show day – February 25, 2023 – when *Hammer* arrives at Paris's Accor Arena. The venue has hosted some of the biggest stars on the planet – Madonna's played here 21 times, Rammstein recorded their *Rammstein: Paris* live album/film here in 2012, and Snoop Dogg and Robbie Williams will appear later this year. It's also an eyesore. Outlining the top of the venue, which stands on the northern bank of the Seine, are big, blue, metal beams that resemble scaffolding. Underneath, the sloping walls are covered in grass. It all gives the impression that the Earth is midway through swallowing a construction site.

What we see inside is far cooler: Gojira are doing their soundcheck. Joe might be casually dressed in baggy black trackies and a baseball cap, but the band sound slick, professional and *monumental* while tearing through *Stranded, Our Time Is Now, The Chant* and *Born For One Thing*.

It's good that Gojira are on top form, because this place is fucking huge. The Accor Arena will host the basketball at next year's Summer Olympics: the floor's big enough for a full-size court, and will be surrounded by 15,000 seats that stretch into the heavens. The configuration's slightly different today, as the stage cuts off the seats right behind it, but there will still be a 16,000-strong crowd.

After soundcheck, *Hammer* is guided to our own personal dressing room. Seriously. After walking through two storeys' worth of bright, endless corridors backstage, we arrive at a door with a sign above it, emblazoned with the words 'METAL HAMMER ROOM'. Down the hallway, the members of Gojira each have a dressing room of their own.

Jean-Michel Labadie prepares to beam aboard the mothership

"OUR GRANDMOTHER GOT A MEDAL FOR HAVING SO MANY CHILDREN!"

JOE DUPLANTIER

Inside ours, there's a sofa, a table laden with free drinks, and a wall-mounted widescreen TV with a live feed of the venue. Joe and Mario soon come in, and we talk about how the tour's been going. Three days ago, Gojira played to 10,000 rapt fans at London's Alexandra Palace (see page 96). Last night's show was even more special, though, because it was in Bordeaux – the city nearest to their hometown of Ondres, in southwestern France. More than 60 of the Duplantier brothers' relatives showed up, including Mario's daughter. Tonight, his wife will be watching.

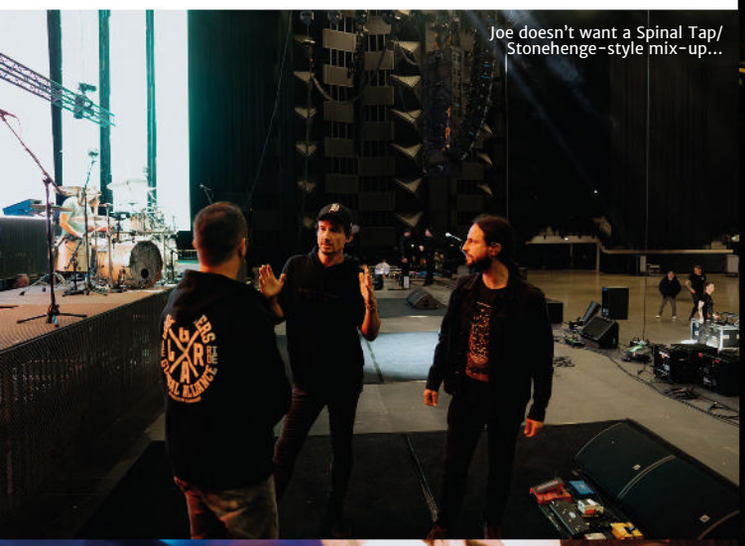
"There are millions of Duplantiers!" Mario laughs. "My dad [French sketch artist Dominique Duplantier] has eight brothers and sisters."

"Our grandmother got a medal from the French government after the war for having so many children," Joe adds. "No joke!"

The pair agree that their family prepared them for serious success. Their mum, Patricia Rosa, was an American yoga teacher who brought them up with the outlook that anything is possible, while Dominique favoured sheer effort over blind faith and worked 12-hour days. That mix of influences led the brothers to aim high, but grind in order to get there.

Gojira – or Godzilla, as they were known until 2001 – played their first show in the summer of 1996 at a village fête in Tartas, France. Thirty of the Duplantiers' metalhead friends showed up and moshed the evening away. "Half the set was Sepultura covers," Joe says. "But we felt like we were Metallica!"

Three years later, they embarked on their first tour, in France, supporting Norwegian black metallers Immortal, during their *At The Heart Of Winter* shows. "We slept in the van with a baseball bat to protect the gear while Immortal



Joe doesn't want a Spinal Tap/ Stonehenge-style mix-up...

Will Evil Mario make an appearance?!

Teamwork, ready to make the dream work!

were sharing the one hotel room," Joe recalls, surprisingly fondly. Gojira's first Paris headliner wouldn't be until 2006, when they played the 1,380-capacity Élysée Montmartre.

The band are well beyond sleeping in vans nowadays, but not even this tour's been faultless. Two weeks ago, a disgruntled concert-goer in Belfast tweeted a photo of Gojira's merch prices, which include £40 for a t-shirt and £80 for a hoodie, causing a shitstorm online.

Joe reveals he didn't find out how much the band were charging until he saw the fallout. "It's out of our hands," he says. "We signed a deal with Warner [Music, which owns Gojira's label, Roadrunner Records] 13 years ago when we were still in France trying to make it and we were super-excited. It was a 360 deal, so it covers everything: the fan club, the YouTube channel, the tour."

However, he admits, "The one thing we insisted on was sustainability. Our shirts are made in a slightly better manner than your average shirt and that has a price to it. That's on us."

We share a friendly goodbye, before the brothers dash off to prepare for their set. On our camera feed, we can see the doors have already opened, with thousands pouring into the Accor Arena.

When we catch up with Gojira's opening act, British metalcore ragers Employed To Serve, they are revelling in the size of the venue. Standing in the corner of the band's huge, bright dressing room, guitarist Sammy Urwin notes the entranceway alone is bigger than some of the backstage areas of other places they've played.

"Playing this many big shows in a row has helped me get over myself," admits singer Justine Jones. "I used to be so awkward talking in between songs. Now, I'm getting used to talking to so many people. I'm learning, if you make a mistake, the chances are that most people won't notice. Just move on."

In the room next door, we meet the other support band, New Zealand groove metallers Alien Weaponry. Drummer Henry de Jong says the tour has also been a learning experience for his band.

"Gojira have this level of professionalism onstage where everything flows so smoothly," he explains. "I feel like we've been picking up some of that, but not directly copying it: 'Oh! That's a way to transition from song to song!'"

Although Alien Weaponry are in their early 20s, they've long looked up to Gojira. "It was 2012 and a drummer from another band showed me [Gojira's fifth album] *L'Enfant Sauvage*," remembers Henry, who has a calf tattoo featuring the artwork from 2008's *The Way Of All Flesh*. "I was like, 'Holy fuck! This just blew my mind!'"

Like Gojira, Alien Weaponry are a family affair: Henry co-founded the band with his younger brother, singer/guitarist Lewis. The bands also share common ideological ground. The New Zealanders often sing about their Māori heritage and historical or ongoing injustices. Similarly, on *Fortitude*, Gojira raised awareness about the

Gojira (left to right): Mario Duplantier, Jean-Michel Labadie, a very excited Joe Duplantier, Christian Andreu

PARIS IN NOMBRES

The stats behind their biggest show yet

5
simultaneous crowdsurfers during *The Gift Of Guilt*

16,000
fans inside the Accor Arena

17
songs played

14
flame units

38
crew members, plus...

30
local stagehands

1
mass spontaneous singalong of *The Chant* after the show

361
miles driven from the last show

5
production trucks

Damn right they're celebrating!

problems affecting indigenous communities in Brazil.

Gojira's activism is one of their biggest draws. We head back into the arena and get talking to a fan called Damien, from Paris.

"Gojira aren't just brutal; they want to give a clear message to new generations," he reasons, wearing a t-shirt featuring the artwork of 2005's *From Mars To Sirius*, an album about the rebirth of a dead planet. "There is no violence in their message. They're important because they're sending kindness through heavy metal."

Before the show, *Hammer*'s taken to the best spot in the house – a platform behind the sound desk. Employed To Serve command Paris to "Wake the fuck up!", and heads bang to the downtuned riff of *Sun Up To Sun Down*. Alien Weaponry inspire even more movement, especially when Lewis demands to see the first crowdsurfers of the night. However, the response the headliners enjoy is something else.

Ahead of Gojira's arrival, a 180-second countdown is projected onto two large screens, eliciting a cheer when it reaches '69'. Then the band rock up to a stage divided into three levels and break into *Born For One Thing*, the capacity crowd singing its clean chorus. During *Stranded*, there's a burst of confetti, and euphoric audience members grab handfuls and toss it around – something they'll do for the rest of the show.

At the onset of *Flying Whales*, bassist Jean-Michel Labadie leaps off the stage's middle platform, the crowd matching his level of enthusiasm as they bounce. Guitarist Christian Andreu maintains the energy by leading a bout of fist-pumping during *Grind*. And then comes *The Chant*. Bloody hell. Its folk-pop melody is picked up by 16,000 people and maintained for the duration of every chorus, to the point that it overpowers Joe's vocals. It's an experience so powerful that the singer can't help but bow at the song's end.

Joe totally won this round of The Floor Is Lava...

"WE SLEPT IN A VAN WITH A BASEBALL BAT"

JOE DUPLANTIER

After closer *The Gift Of Guilt* inspires five simultaneous crowdsurfers and Paris bids Gojira adieu with an unprompted reprise of *The Chant*, there's an atmosphere of victory backstage. The bandmembers head to one of their dressing rooms, but their cheers of elation are so loud that we can hear them from our own. We see Mario again, one last time, in a guest room where champagne's freely flowing, surrounded by dozens of friends and colleagues. Even the ex-manager who got Godzilla onto that Immortal tour is here.

Gojira reached new heights this evening. However, the drive instilled into the Duplantiers as children is demanding they keep pushing. Mario's already planning album number eight. "My ideas are sounding a bit more busy than *Fortitude*," he revealed to us earlier. "I'm really into dynamic tempos right now. That's my thing."

Meanwhile, Joe still doesn't feel like their metal band from a little town in rural France has 'made it' yet and, true to his upbringing, he's focused on the future. What *is* the band's end goal? When will they reach it? What will happen after that? He doesn't know.

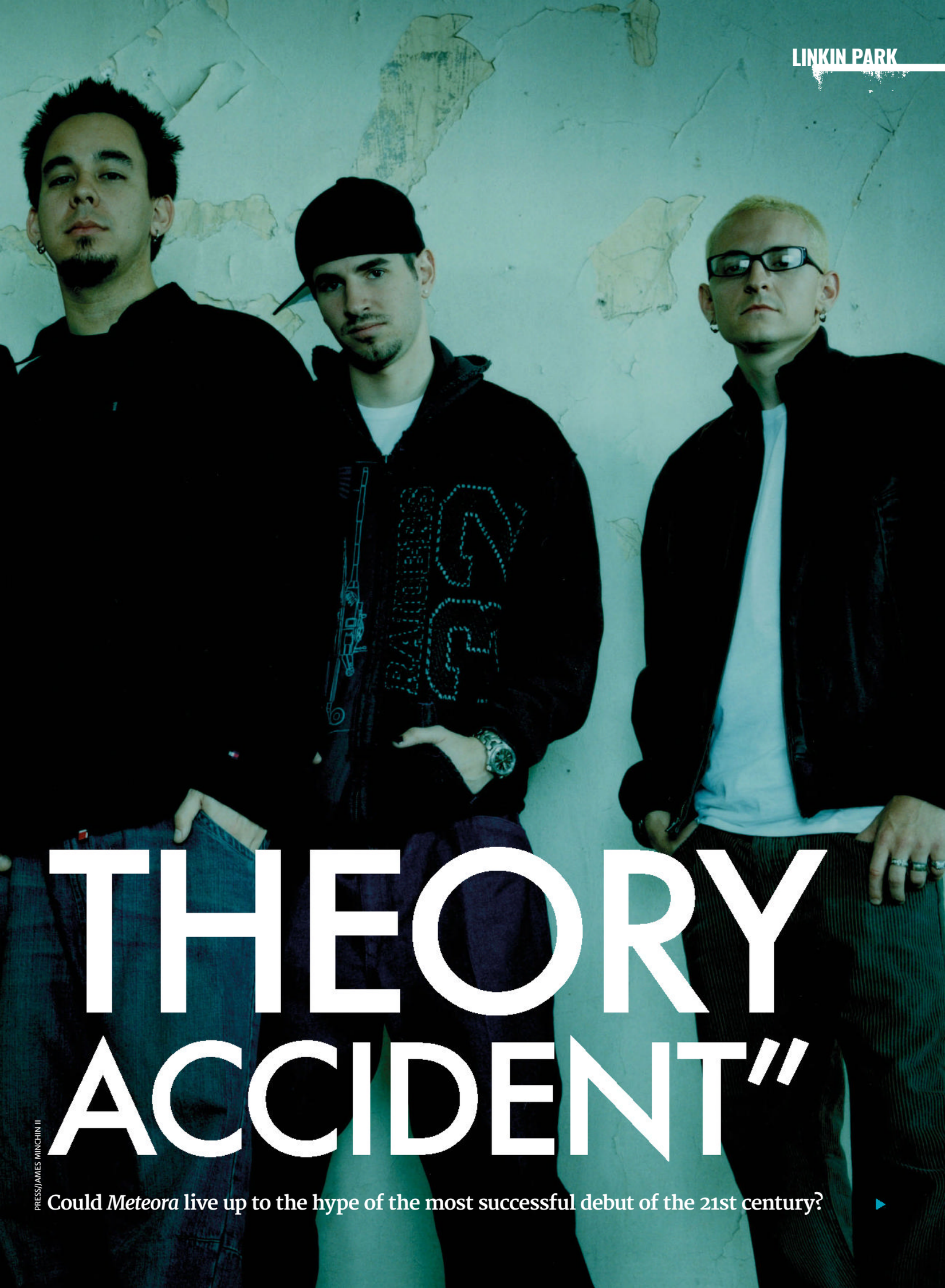
"We have a crew so big that I don't know some of the people's names," he says. "In that sense, we've made it. But I remember saying that 20 years ago, when we first headlined a proper venue in Paris. It's up to us to define when we've made it – so all we will do is keep going."

***FORTITUDE* IS OUT NOW VIA ROADRUNNER**

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS

"HYBRID WASN'T AN

After the runaway success of 2000's *Hybrid Theory*, Linkin Park had something to prove.



THEORY ACCIDENT"

PRESS/JAMES MINCHIN II

Could *Meteora* live up to the hype of the most successful debut of the 21st century?

Hybrid Theory was a genre-defining juggernaut. Released in 2000, Linkin Park's debut album was a jagged blend of metal, hip hop, electronica and irresistible pop choruses, which pushed nu metal to a new mainstream level. The following year, it became the best-selling album in the United States.

By the time the Cali six-piece started creating its follow-up, *Meteora*, the hype around them was at an all-time high. Recorded at a time when online piracy had started putting the shitters up the music industry, protecting the record became top priority for the band's label, Warner.

"We had 16 boxes of giant reel tape that we had to take to New York, to go mix the record, on a plane with two security guards," says Rob McDermott, who managed the band from 2000 to 2010 and was tasked with devising an over-the-top strategy to keep the music secret.

Security measures continued as *Meteora*'s release date approached, and journalists invited to an exclusive pre-release listening party were asked to give up their phones on arrival. Luckily for Linkin Park's team, the plans worked.

Speaking to us over Zoom from his home in LA, Rob motions to the shimmering plaques on the wall behind him, including a *Hybrid Theory* diamond award representing 10 million sales. "Warner made those just internally," he continues, "because we were able to ship four million records around the world without a leak."

Hybrid Theory might have put Linkin Park on the map, but *Meteora* proved they were here to stay. Released at a time when the star power of nu metal was beginning to wane, it ushered in a bigger, more polished, anthemic sound, purpose-built for stadiums and festival fields, and produced ubiquitous blockbusters such as *Numb* and *Somewhere I Belong*.

"In places in Asia, we started getting to the point where we couldn't leave our hotel without a planned itinerary and security," says bassist Dave 'Phoenix' Farrell, revealing the band's profile rose to uncomfortable levels during the *Meteora* touring cycle.

Recalling instances when the band were bundled into vans to escape mobs of fans, Dave says he used an alias every time he checked into a hotel. "If I want to go to Starbucks, I don't want it to be a big ordeal. Now I know how to navigate that a lot better, but with *Meteora*, we were just starting to come to terms with a lot of that. We were learning on the fly."

Linkin Park started piecing together the songs for *Meteora* during Ozzfest in summer 2001. Working in a makeshift studio at the back of their tour bus, spirits were high and creative juices flowed: at one point, the band had more than 80 songs in various states of realisation. By the time they headed into LA's NRG Studios in August 2002, where they had recorded *Hybrid Theory*, with returning producer Don Gilmore, they had whittled that down to 13 close-to-complete demos.

Constant interference from label Warner, who questioned everything from the band's line-up to their vision, had made the *Hybrid Theory* sessions feel fraught. Due to the album's success, they now stepped back, allowing the band to make the follow-up they wanted.

It didn't have the same fresh-out-the-box vigour as their debut, but *Meteora* is arguably a stronger set of songs – less angsty, deeper and more emotional. And while that's no doubt due to the band's growth as writers, *Meteora*'s ongoing ability to resonate is unmistakably down to late singer Chester Bennington who, despite being sick for five weeks and having to record his vocals alone while the rest of the album was being mixed, put in the strongest performance of his career.

Having struggled with addiction and depression from an early age, the turmoil in the singer's private life is laid bare in the powerful lyrics for tracks such as *Somewhere I Belong, Easier To Run* and *Numb*. The latter would go on to become nu metal's last true mega hit, passing over a billion streams on both Spotify and YouTube.

"I've learned over the years that really great vocalists can mimic many different things," says Dave. "Chester was that to a T. He could be a trumpet. He could sing like Barry White. He could mimic stuff with his voice, and, because of that, he had such an incredible range."

Meteora, Dave says, was the sound of the band realising what a potent weapon they had in their midst. "We were like kids in a candy store as we discovered more and more places that he could go vocally."

Meteora was released on March 25, 2003, to critical and commercial acclaim – although the general consensus was that Linkin Park had played it safe and turned in *Hybrid Theory* 2.0. Speaking in 2008, Chester agreed. "Within the band, we call *Hybrid Theory* and *Meteora* 'Volumes I and II'," he told *Kerrang!*'s Tom Bryant. "They're very similar in a lot of ways. There's almost a formula to them, you can tell what each song is going to do next."

However, *Meteora* didn't merely rehash past glories. "We wanted to further define and evolve our sound as well," rapper Mike Shinoda said. "A song like *Breaking The Habit*, for example, could never have existed on *Hybrid Theory*; it was a more mature song, lyrically and sonically."

To promote the album, alongside *five* massive singles, the band embarked on a tour lasting from February 2003 to September 2004. The gruelling cycle included their first-ever foray into stadiums, supporting Metallica on their 2003 Summer Sanitarium tour, alongside Limp Bizkit, Deftones and Mudvayne. It saw them take on the daunting task of playing to almost a million diehard Metallica fans over two and half months.

"WE COULDN'T LEAVE OUR HOTEL WITHOUT SECURITY"

DAVE FARRELL, BASSIST

The intensive schedule proved especially tough for Chester. Drink and drugs had started to take a toll on his relationship with his bandmates during promotion for *Hybrid Theory*, but by the end of the *Meteora* tour, he was in an even darker place.

"I wasn't leaving my house. I'd shack up in my closet in the dark and shake all day," he told Tom Bryant. "I'd wake up and have a pint of Jack Daniel's to calm down, then I'd pop a bunch of pills and go back in my closet and fucking freak out for the rest of the day. I was a mess. I was falling through windows, having seizures and going to hospital the whole time. It was fucking ridiculous. I was a total wreck."

"He'd talk about it later, but in the moment, you wouldn't notice it," says Rob McDermott of Chester's mindset at the time. "He left it all out on the stage. To me, that was his therapy. He was there. He was in that moment feeling the pain of everyone and himself."

If Chester was struggling with his mental health on the road, he hid it well, according to P.O.D.'s Sonny Sandoval, who supported Linkin Park on the North American leg of the

Chester Bennington had one helluva range

GETTY

Linkin Park performing with Jay-Z and Paul McCartney at the Grammys on February 8, 2006

Meteora tour in 2004. "He was a sweetheart," he remembers. "He had something about him that lit up the room."

Sonny describes the tour, which also featured Hoobastank and The Story So Far, as a real "family" affair. Each night, the bands would hang out in each other's dressing rooms, smoking shisha and drinking, while later Chester would invite everyone onstage together to perform the band's incendiary closer, *One Step Closer*. Those bonds of friendship were put to the test one night, however, when the bands and crew celebrated on the roof of a high-rise hotel.

"At one point, we all get excited, not even realising that we're so close to the edge," recalls Sonny, revealing his heart still races when he tells the story. "I picked up Chester and, not even realising and just having fun, he flings back. Literally, if he had fallen out of my arms, he would have fallen off this roof. But I had him so tight, and then he was just dangling there screaming, and I am panicking, freaking out. I told him, 'Bro, I could have dropped you.' And then he looked at me and said, 'You would never have dropped me.' And then he just gave me a big old hug."

The cultural impact of *Meteora* went far beyond its initial burst of success. In 2003, *Session*, the album's eerie instrumental track composed entirely of scratching and sampling, courtesy of turntablist Joe Hahn, was nominated for a Grammy. The following year, the band teamed up with rapper Jay-Z for the now iconic, MTV-sponsored mashup collab, *Collision Course*.

"Mike had just gotten off the phone call with management saying, 'OK, Jay-Z wants to do this new thing through MTV with us,'" says Dave, remembering the moment they heard the news. "At that point, Jay was an artist that we loved – one of our favourite rappers. We were like, 'Holy crap, we don't know what that means, but yup, let's make this happen.'"

In 2006, the band and Jay-Z won the Grammy for Best Rap/Sung Collaboration for *Numb/Encore*, and performed it at the awards ceremony, with a star vocal turn from Paul McCartney.

"THE STAGE WAS CHESTER'S THERAPY"

ROB McDERMOTT, FORMER MANAGER

"The first time I met Paul, he showed up to a rehearsal and I was terrified," says Dave, who cites working with the Beatle as a career highlight. "I was terrified that he was going to be disgusted with my bass playing – why am I playing bass if Paul McCartney's here? That didn't make sense in my head. I don't think I slept the night before that first rehearsal, but it couldn't have been anything more the opposite."

Twenty years on, *Meteora* is rightly viewed as a modern classic, and has sold 27 million copies worldwide. In February, the band surprise-released *Lost*, a gloriously wistful, clenched-teeth track from the *Meteora* sessions that had been languishing on one of Mike Shinoda's hard drives. Originally left off the album because the band felt it was too similar to *Numb*, it sounds nostalgic yet fresh – a gift to the legions of fans who thought they'd never hear Chester's voice on a 'new' song again.

It's also a testament to how much gas was in the tank during Linkin Park's early days. Having reached a level in their career they could never have imagined, the band would take a left turn with their third album, 2007's *Minutes To Midnight*, working with producer Rick Rubin to strip down their sound and enter a brand new era.

"*Meteora* really set the stage for us to make *Minutes To Midnight* and to begin to branch out," agrees Dave, considering the album's legacy. "But I think more than anything, it needed to prove to listeners that what we had done or accomplished on *Hybrid Theory* wasn't an accident, and that we did have something to say."

***METEORA 20TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION* IS OUT ON APRIL 7 VIA WARNER RECORDS**

GETTY

Linkin Park: *Hybrid Theory* and *Meteora* were groundbreaking

PRESS/JAMES MINCHIN II

LOST AND FOUND

In February, Linkin Park released *Lost*, an unheard song from the *Meteora* sessions. Bassist Dave 'Phoenix' Farrell recalls its conception and discovery

WHAT CAN YOU REMEMBER ABOUT RECORDING THE SONG *LOST*?

Dave: "*Lost* is a track that made it all the way through the process [in 2002]. We recorded it in the same sessions that we recorded the rest of the album, and it was mixed by Andy Wallace. Because of that process, it sounds exactly like it fits on *Meteora*. Our intention with *Lost* was always to use it in some space. It doesn't necessarily make the album, but there's always going to be a TV show, a movie or something [we can use it for], or as a bonus track."

WHEN DID YOU REDISCOVER THE SONG?

"We just kind of forgot about it and found it, like, a year and a half ago and said, 'We never used this song. That's insane.' It's crazy that this song exists and it's just lived on these drives and we've never actually plugged it into anything."

HOW DID YOU FEEL WHEN YOU HEARD IT AGAIN AFTER ALL OF THESE YEARS?

"I felt pretty conflicted. I've always loved Chester's voice so, to hear it again on something that I'd forgotten about was exciting and special and new. I still felt like, 'Holy crap, that voice.' Like, 'Wow, I'm still in love with that voice.' But then there was conflicting emotion, just missing him and missing the chance to get to hang out with him and laugh with him. And I think that in a way, that's the same connection that a lot of our fans have with him and with his voice. I have that in common with a lot of people."

WORDS: ELEANOR GOODMAN

YouTuber Shredder Trailblazer

YouTube guitar hero Sophie Lloyd has made the leap from internet fame to IRL stardom via a tour with MGK. Now she's out to convince the doubters she's for real – starting with herself

PRESS

It was during a show in August 2022 at the FirstEnergy Stadium in Ohio, home to the Cleveland Browns NFL team, in front of 41,000 people, that Sophie Lloyd knew she was doing something right. She was playing guitar for US pop-punk/tabloid star Machine Gun Kelly, when he brought four fans onstage. One of them was a girl, who ran right past him to gift Sophie a cap.

"It was such a cool moment!" Sophie grins today. "I was on my knees jamming with her. It was one of my favourite moments of the tour – and I still have that hat."

That tour was in support of Machine Gun Kelly's sixth album, *Mainstream Sellout*, and encompassed some of the US and Europe's biggest venues. Before Sophie joined his band, she hadn't even played to 1,000 people before. At least, not in person.

Sophie is part of a generation of YouTube guitarists – players showing off their chops online, building a following via a combination of covers, original songs, tuition and personality. She has 869,000 subscribers, and is unique in making that leap to IRL stardom in arenas. Some old-school gatekeepers might argue she hasn't paid her dues, but she stresses she's put in many hours of practice, and it took eight years before her channel made any money.

"Anyone who thinks it's easy to get big on YouTube clearly fucking doesn't know shit," she says. "I get what they're saying, in a way… people who've been in broken-down vans, and slept in the 'roach coach' where there's roaches climbing everywhere, for a gig that's paying you £30 – I get it. And I did elements of that when I was growing up. But the world has changed now – you either need to evolve with it and become successful with it, or you're just stuck in your ways and you're complaining about it. We want to be inspiring these young people growing up and creating, we don't want to be bashing them down."

"THEY THOUGHT I WAS A SATAN WORSHIPPER!"

Sophie's sitting in her living room this afternoon, in front of a towering scratching post, as cats Luna and Jaxx run around. Behind that, boyfriend Chris Painter, her co-writer, drummer and sometimes videographer, is on the sofa on a laptop. She speaks with the kind of smiling, chatty confidence you see in her videos, clear and assured but not afraid to show vulnerability.

Her introduction to heavy music came from her dad, a data scientist, who would play Rory Gallagher, Joe Bonamassa, Led Zeppelin and Black Sabbath in the car. At age nine, she took a few lessons in classical guitar, but it didn't really land. It was seeing an episode of *SpongeBob SquarePants* – yes, really – soon after that inspired her to pick up an electric guitar.

"People have these really cool backstories and I'm like, 'Fuck, mine was an episode of *SpongeBob*', she laughs. "It's when they cover the Twisted Sister song *I Wanna Rock*, and it's like [she sings] *'I'm a goofy goober, rock!'* with lasers shooting out of guitars. I was like, 'Oh my god, that's so awesome. That's what I wanna do.'"

Falling in love with electric guitar, she got big into emo and punk, alongside guitar virtuosos Joe Satriani and Steve Vai. The problem was, there weren't many heavy music fans in her gentile hometown of Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire, and she felt like an outcast.

"I dressed like a proper rocker," she explains. "I had the undersides of my hair dyed black, and I would wear studded bracelets. Which doesn't sound too extreme, but in Henley-on-Thames, it's like, 'Who the hell is this Satan worshipper?!' And I felt like I didn't really connect. I didn't have anyone to go to gigs with. I'd go with my dad, and he'd be there in his suit in the back row, while I'm moshing in the front. I wish I'd had people to share that stuff with."

Instead, Sophie spent a lot of time alone. While everyone else was hanging out at lunchtime, she'd go to the school's music room. While they went to parties, she would stay home and practise songs. Between the ages of 13-17, she became withdrawn. "It was kind of like a dark time, I guess?" she remembers. "But at the same time, you look back and you're like, 'I'm so grateful that happened', because that's where my inspiration and creativity really grew."

During that period, she also joined her first band, The Hidden Truth, via the website Joinmyband.com. Their first set included covers by Chelsea Grin, Parkway Drive, Avenged Sevenfold and Black Veil Brides. "We were *awful*," she laughs. "But that was a fun time. It was the first time I'd been around other musicians, and discovered the love of playing music."

Like her dad, Sophie excelled in science, and landed a scholarship to study Forensic Science at Sussex. But just before she was meant to start, she got the feeling something was wrong, and made a snap decision to apply to music school BIMM London, where she'd spend the next four years.

It was another tough time for Sophie who, desperate to get good grades, doggedly studied genres she wasn't interested in, such as gypsy jazz, rather than playing the metal she loved – all while in a "bad relationship" with someone who didn't want her to pursue music at all. When they broke up after her second year, she started therapy and antidepressants, leading to a change in mindset. Rather than worrying about her academic performance, she loosened up and applied her new knowledge to her rock playing – and still got a First.

"I was like, 'Right, I'm gonna take home all this stuff that I'm learning around different genres, and play it through a distortion amp to a rock backing track and see how it sounds,'" she says. "I started writing and honing in on my particular sound. Although they felt like some of the worst times, I was sort of born again. Sorry, that got a bit deep!"

Although Sophie never had a career path in mind, she's thrived on YouTube, uploading her "shred versions" of songs by artists ranging from Iron Maiden and Killswitch Engage to Britney Spears and Dua Lipa, alongside vlogs about everything from pedals to performance anxiety. She started her channel in 2012 at age 16, hoping to meet likeminded people, and went full time with it after BIMM while working a side job at dessert restaurant Creams ("I don't mean to brag, but I make amazing sundaes!" she laughs).

Early YouTuber inspirations were Andy James, then guitarist of Sacred Mother Tongue and now in Five Finger Death Punch, alongside personable general creators such as danisnotonfire and AmazingPhil. For Sophie, YouTube isn't just about guitar playing, it's about relatability. When she arrived in the States for the MGK tour, she filmed herself lying in bed, crying, nervous and homesick.

"I want people to see it's not just all rock'n'roll. We're all humans, we all go through shit. Sometimes you can look at social media and be like, 'Everything's perfect for this person,' but I think it's important to break that wall down and be like, 'Well, it's not always sunshine and roses,'" she explains.

The tour was a leap for Sophie, who had only played small gigs with The Hidden Truth, a few bands at uni, and her last venture, Marisa And The Moths. She'd messaged MGK two years earlier on a whim, saying, 'If you ever need a guitarist, hit me up!' – and there he was in her DMs in April 2022, looking for a live guitarist. After a FaceTime meeting with him and his team, she learned the songs within a month.

Stamp of approval: Matt Heafy features on Sophie's solo album

PRESS

Sophie shredding onstage with Machine Gun Kelly and Justin 'Jus' Lyons

"I was fucking terrified, because it's such a different thing that I didn't even really know if I *wanted* to do it. I didn't know if I'd like it," she admits. "But I always try to live my life with the mantra, 'What would make the best story'? And I thought I'd just give it a go. If it fails, at least I've got a funny story to tell at the pub on a Friday night, you know? Ha ha ha!"

Growing up on YouTube rather than 'paying her dues' the old-fashioned way had left Sophie with a bad case of imposter syndrome that she'd long been battling before this tour.

"I was like, 'I've come through this such unique avenue. Do I deserve to be at this level when I haven't gone that traditional route?' But I think your journey's your journey. And I think you've just got to try and shake that," she says. "You shouldn't have any shame about what you've done to get to where you are, because at the end of the day everyone works to be where they are, and if they're there, they're there for a reason."

Luckily, her nerves evaporated as soon as she stepped onstage for the first date in Austin, Texas. "I was like, 'Oh my God, this is what I'm meant to be doing,'" she smiles.

Sophie's willingness to be in the public eye was tested when a baseless rumour started circulating in the media that MGK had cheated on his fiancée, actress Megan Fox, with her. To get some downtime, the guitarist and her boyfriend retreated to her parents' house, where they were doorstopped by a reporter. Meanwhile, Megan stepped in to dispel the rumours, calling Sophie "insanely talented".

"Yeah, that was wild!" she exclaims, calmly but with disbelief. "I never thought I'd be in some sort of internet scandal. The week it happened, I didn't know how to deal with it. I've been in a relationship with my boyfriend for five years, and we just had our anniversary. It felt like a step back for women in the industry, in a way. Where just because there's a girl in the band, they automatically become the homewrecker, when it's like, 'I'm just doing my job.' I was annoyed and I didn't want girls to see that."

"I WAS TERRIFIED ABOUT TOURING WITH MGK"

At the start of the pandemic, Sophie and boyfriend Chris began working on her debut album, candidly titled *Imposter Syndrome*. Following on from her Satriani-influenced instrumental *Delusions* EP in 2018, and inspired by Slash's 2010 self-titled debut solo record, it features an array of guest vocalists, including her former bandmate Marisa, Nathan James from Inglorious, Trivium's Matt Heafy and more to be announced.

"The album is so full-circle," says Sophie. "I've gone from being scared to even do a live performance online – that's why I started my Twitch in 2021, to try and start doing live stuff to feel less like an imposter – to playing Wembley Arena live. It's a cool story."

She plans to tour *Imposter Syndrome* next year, and then carry on with YouTube, Twitch, Patreon and whatever else comes up, in an era where artists need multiple revenue streams to survive, and on a mission to "bring shred guitar into the mainstream". In the long run, she'd like to open an animal sanctuary. For now, she's happy she's been able to reach so many people – especially young women, like the one at the Ohio show.

"Everything I do, I do with the thought of my 15-year-old self watching," she says. "I'm making my YouTube channel for that girl. That's the same with my album. I wrote it with the idea of, 'What would that girl wanna listen to?' or 'What would be inspiring for her?' I wanna make that depressed little metalhead child happy and make her smile."

***IMPOSTER SYNDROME* IS EXPECTED LATER THIS YEAR. SOPHIE'S SINGLE WITH MATT HEAFY, *FALL OF MAN*, IS OUT NOW**

GETTY

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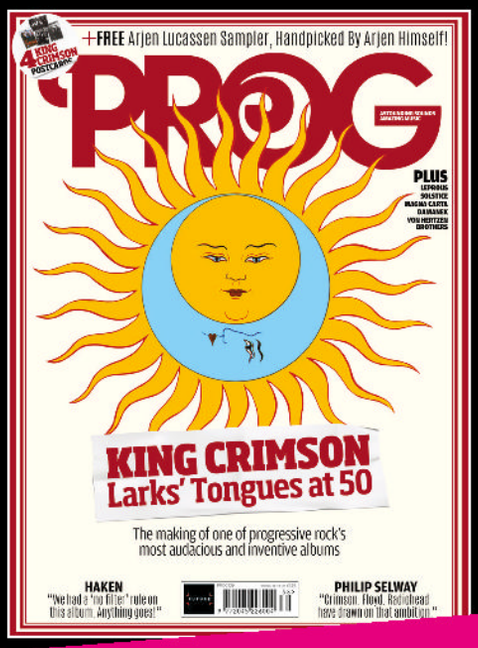

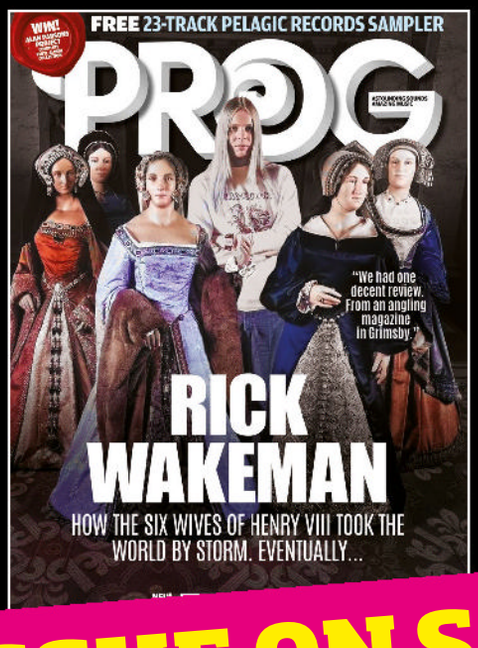

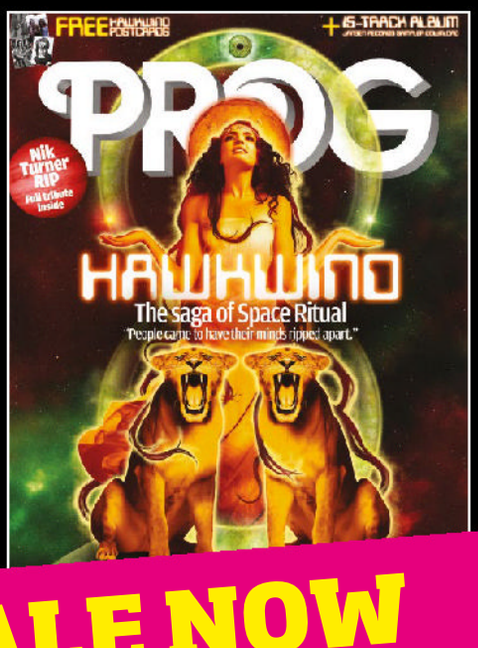

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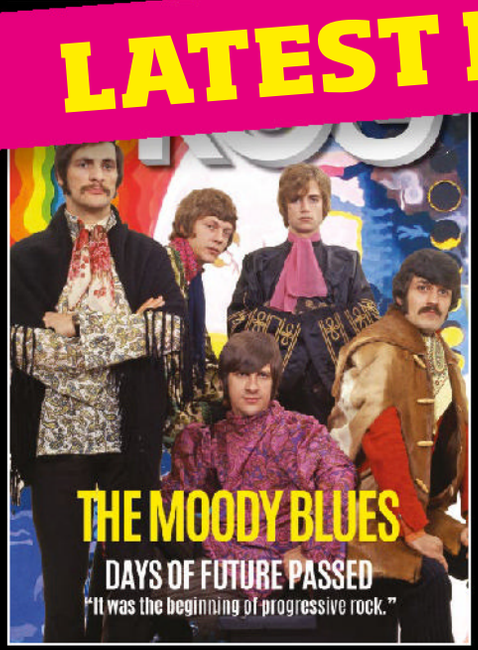

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THE HAMMER INTERVIEW

ICE-T

Groundbreaking metal icon, hip hop elder statesman, controversy magnet, friend of Megadeth, Lemmy, Slayer and more – it's the Body Count frontman's world, we just live in it

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL

PRESS

LA
BC

Tracy Marrow is one of life's high achievers. "Good luck!" the man now known as Ice-T says when we inform him we're going to try to cover as much of his career as we can over our allotted hour together, before shooting us a grin, rocking his head back and unleashing the first of many deep belly laughs.

Orphaned as a young child, Ice's early life took in homelessness and a stint in the army before he became one of the defining voices of West Coast hip hop in the 80s. The 1990s saw him unexpectedly pivot towards metal with the formation of his controversial band Body Count. "I never wanted to be the best, I just wanted to be in the league," he says with a shrug. "When I started rapping, I just wanted to be mentioned amongst the rappers. With Body Count we just wanted to be involved in metal so they would mention us. Maybe not the best, but we're in there."

Today the 65-year-old is in the unique position of being both a hip hop elder statesman and an iconic metal singer. His circle of friends and collaborators includes Megadeth's Dave Mustaine, Hatebreed's Jamey Jasta and members of Slayer. He's got an equally high-profile sideline as an actor, and he's just launched his new podcast, *Ice-T's Daily Game*. So how do you become a multidisciplinary legend? Over to you, Ice…

You lost both your parents at a very early age. How hard was that for you as a child?
"Wasn't as hard as you think. I was with my mother, we was watching TV and she just leaned her head back and had a heart attack. It wasn't as traumatic as you think, you're too young, you just worry about yourself. When my father passed I was in the seventh grade. I didn't know what was gonna happen to me, but I was shipped out to LA to live with his sister."

"I KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE HOMELESS"

Does losing your parents so young give you a better understanding of your own mortality?
"It made me understand life better. The guy who is 20 years older than me might outlive me, the kid that is calling me an old motherfucker might die! You might know how much money you have, but nobody knows how much time they have. I learned early in life that you don't get a preset."

You lived with your aunt in LA until you were 17, but then you left and had to survive on your own…
"Yeah, and I've never had a relative to fall back on since. I got friends who could stay with their parents, come in at night and there would be a plate there. I never had that. I always had to find a place. I lived in motels and cars, wherever I could. I know what it's like to be homeless and out there trying to find your way."

What are your earliest musical memories?
"My father and mother always had music on in the house: James Brown, early Motown. When they passed, my aunt and my cousin introduced me to rock'n'roll. My cousin thought he was Jimi Hendrix, he listened to the rock stations. I was intrigued by people like Black Sabbath and the heavier stuff, but all my schoolmates at Crenshaw High are listening to [70s funk superstars] Parliament/Funkadelic, so I had a really broad musical landscape that was going on in my head."

Is this when you first met future Body Count guitarist Ernie C?
"Yeah. He was playing concerts at school, playing [70s guitar hero] Peter Frampton to a bunch of gangbangers! They didn't know the song, but they could see this guy could play the fuck out of a guitar. It takes courage to find your own musical identity. I get messages from Black kids into metal who are so happy for us, telling us they were outcasts and they didn't have anyone who shared that love with them."

Did you think about making music at this time?
"No. Because I can't play an instrument and I couldn't sing a note. Hip hop was just a thing where you could put me in a studio and I could say anything, but it would rhyme. It wasn't even like you were making records or songs, you were just saying whatever the fuck you feel, it was very raw. That was the only way that I could have got into the music industry, through a genre that allowed that."

Did you imagine hip hop would become one of the commercially successful genres on the planet within a few years?
"Crazy. To us, it was just fun – no one had ever bought a car from rapping! People would say to me, 'Ice, why you wasting your time with this rap shit?' They thought I was bullshitting. I would break the law all week and rap at the weekend. Then I made [breakout 1987 gangsta rap track] *6 In The Mornin'*, and it was like, 'Oh shit!' We never saw it coming."

Did any other rappers at the time love metal like you?
"I don't know if anyone listened to it, but that commonality is there, whether it's LL Cool J using those big guitars or Beastie Boys rapping over Led Zeppelin. Listen to that song *Wicked* by Ice Cube, it's in there for sure."

You formed Body Count in 1990. What was the idea behind the band?
"Body Count wasn't trying to do rap-metal, we were just trying to do metal. I was trying to cross Suicidal Tendencies, the impending doom of Black Sabbath and the speed of Slayer, but I was just going to sing the same things as I always have: motherfuckers in the parking lot with pistols!"

Body Count played the first Lollapalooza tour in 1991. How did you end up doing that?
"Ernie was doing some stuff with Perry Farrell [Jane's Addiction frontman and Lollapalooza founder], and Perry told him he wanted me in this film he was doing called *Gift*. While we were shooting, Perry tells me he had this festival and he told me he wanted a rap act on it. I told him I'd love to do it. My set was an hour and they told me I could do whatever I wanted, so I thought it was a great time to debut my band."

How did that work?
"Halfway through my set I would say, 'Now I'm gonna prove to you that rock'n'roll has nothing to do with colour', and we'd bring Body Count out to finish the show. It was the highlight of the day!"

Did you ever feel like you weren't wanted at these predominately white rock shows?
"Nah, nah. It was all white kids, with a few Black kids sprinkled in there, but white rock kids had no problem with hip hop. The music is definitely connected. You don't hear MCs say they R&B the mic, they ROCK the mic."

Never? Seriously?
"OK, there was one gig once. We played with Exodus and D.R.I. in Northern California, and it's all skinheads.

PRESS

We come out, we got the yellow police tape, all that shit, and they're just screaming, 'Fuck you! Fuck you!' Within, I'll say, 30 seconds into the set, we had a moshpit. They just didn't know what to expect, but when we fired up those guitars, they were with us. Honestly, that's the closest we've ever come to experiencing any shit."

Body Count opened for Metallica and Guns N' Roses on their co-headlining tour back in 1992. What were those dates like?
"That was dope! Ernie is close friends with Duff [McKagan, Guns N' Roses bassist], and Kirk [Hammett, Metallica guitarist] has always been a really big fan of Body Count. Trust me, they wouldn't have put us on if they didn't think we could do what we do. As far as having any negativity from the fans, never. If they don't like our shit they're always in the minority."

Body Count's debut album was released in 1992, but it was overshadowed by controversy over the song *Cop Killer*. What are your memories of that?
"We got caught up in the media. What happened was, the police were under attack for being brutal, as usual. The police in Texas found this song and they decided to use it as a lightning rod, like this was the problem. The best defence is offence, so they attacked me. I'm the bad guy? I'm making a record, you're out there killing people! But people went with it."

Was there ever a time when you were fearful of what might happen to you?
"Nah, because they really went for Time Warner [parent company of Body Count's label, Sire Records], not me personally. It was an eventful couple of years. They tried to blackball me. It is what it is. You don't get stripes for not fighting battles."

Why do you think they didn't go after you personally?
"They understand why a young Black man would be harder to police. They knew why I was angry, they knew I had free speech. But Time Warner: 'Yo, why did you guys let him do it? I thought you were on our side?' I could see what was happening and I asked to leave."

***Cop Killer* was inspired by police brutality. It's sadly still a relevant subject, isn't it?**
"Yeah. It's a song about a character that experiences police brutality and snaps. Thirty years later we are vindicated. Because people have camera phones, and they can see, 'Oh! This is what Ice-T is singing about!' We still play it, we still close our shows with it. It's about how we feel, not what we're gonna do."

It could have been made today…
"No, no, no, It's part of history and I'm glad it was made back then, because it shows how far we haven't come. If it was made now people would think the problem just started. No, no, no, it's been around for years."

In 1993, you teamed up with Slayer for *Disorder*, a medley of three songs by UK punk band The Exploited, on the soundtrack to the movie *Judgment Night*. How did that come about?
"I got a call asking if I wanted to be involved in the soundtrack, and they're telling me they're hooking rappers up with rock bands. I was kinda insulted because I have a rock band – 'What y'all doing?' Then they went, 'Oh, they want you to work with Slayer.' 'Slayer? Word. OK, I'm in!'"

Rapper, rocker, actor, podcast host… Ice-T sure likes to keep busy

Body Count: a cross between Suicidal Tendencies, Sabbath's doom and Slayer's speed

"LEMMY WAS SUCH A COOL GUY. I WAS IN AWE"

Didn't you see some white supremacist on TV wearing a Slayer shirt while you were there?
"Yeah, ha ha! This white supremacist group were on the box, and they were all wearing Slayer shirts. I remember Kerry [King, Slayer guitarist] turning to me and saying, 'Wait 'til they get a load of this track!' We still perform *Disorder* as a track with Body Count sometimes. I'm honoured to be one of the only people who has done a duet with them."

You've worked with so many huge metal artists over the years, from Slayer and Megadeth to Motörhead and Hatebreed…
"It's mutual respect. Those cats have energy, and I like to think that there is an Ice-T energy. Lemmy was such a cool guy. All ego went out the door, we were all just people, but I was still in awe. I had fun with all of them, and I'll take it to my grave, because some of that shit was wild!"

You're good friends with Dave Mustaine as well. How did that come about?
"I fuck with Dave because he is the best in his field. He had been asked to pick his top five albums of the year one year, and he'd just put [Ice's 1991 hip hop album] *Original Gangster* there five times. I'm like, 'I gotta meet this motherfucker!' He told me it's the best rap album ever made. And that mutual respect remains to this day, and it's a beautiful place when you find it."

You and Dave are pretty different people. What's the common ground?
"We both respect each other. Dave is very opinionated, he has his own way of seeing things, and I do too, but we meet as men. We talk and sometimes it's like, 'I'm not feeling that, but I respect your opinion.' It never drops because we hold each other in high regard, and when you do that all the rock star bullshit goes away."

You must be the only person to have Grammys for Best Rap and Best Metal Performances.
"Yeah, the first one I got was with [legendary producer] Quincy Jones [in 1990, for rapping on the Jones-produced track *Back On The Block*]. He sort of snuck us through the back door because they weren't really recognising rap back then. Body Count got nominated for *Black Hoodie* [for 2018's Grammys]. We performed it at the pre-show, they took us backstage and had the cameras on us, and we're going 'We won it! We won it!' and they go, 'And the winner is… Mastodon!' So the second year we got nominated, for *Bum-Rush* [for 2021's Grammys], I was sitting right here at this table: 'Fuck awards, fuck that bullshit… oh, we're nominated?!' You appreciate when you get them."

You're an award-winning rapper, rocker, actor and podcast host. Do you still feel like that hungry, driven guy sleeping in a car?
"Absolutely. I feel like at any second this could all be taken away from me. People ask why my hustle is so strong. It's a survival instinct that is driven into you. I'm so appreciative of everything. You're only here for a short time, man."

***ICE-T'S DAILY GAME* PODCAST IS AVAILABLE NOW VIA APPLE, SPOTIFY AND MORE**

PRESS

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They've got the masks, the mayhem and Sid Wilson and Ross Robinson in their corner. Are the enigmatic Swollen Teeth the new Slipknot?

WAIT AND

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL

PRESS

"Do you have any idea how lucky you are? There are people all queuing to get into the most exclusive club in the world, this boulder is just about to run down the hill, smash them all out of the way, and you're standing behind it and can just wander in!"

Slipknot DJ and all-round loose cannon Sid Wilson is screaming excitably at *Metal Hammer* via Zoom, while his friend, former Slipknot producer Ross Robinson, looks on. According to Sid, we are privy to something big. He may well be right. The only problem is that we're not 100% on what exactly that "something" is.

The subject of his excitement is his recent discovery, Swollen Teeth. A mysterious quartet who deal in furious, jagged modern metal, they have seemingly appeared out of thin air. They go by the names Megaa (vocals/sampler/turntable), Sun (vocals/bass), Skutch (drums), and HOG (guitar), and they wear full-face masks that make them look like decaying zombie thugs from some dystopian near-future. Their furious, Sid-produced debut single, *SWOLLENTEETH*, sent the hype needle off the scale. Their upcoming self-titled debut EP, released on a new label co-founded by Ross, looks to push it even further. And… well, that's about all we know about them.

They may have two of the biggest names in metal in their corner, but Swollen Teeth are fully leaning into the enigma. They refuse to divulge their faces, their real identities, their back story, where they're from or anything else that might give the game away. They're certainly not doing interviews. "I don't even know who they are," claims Ross.

Normally, this would be massively frustrating, but Sid and Ross's swivel-eyed enthusiasm has piqued our curiosity, even if they can't – or won't – give us much info. So, with very little to work with, it's up to us to try and get to the bottom of what the hell the deal is with Swollen Teeth.

It was late last year when Sid discovered came across a brand new band on Instagram. A man who keeps his ear to the ground musically, he was instantly intrigued.

"You couldn't really see what was going on, or who they were," he says of this initial encounter with Swollen Teeth. "I was just getting these flashes: no songs, just different sounds creating an uncomfortable atmosphere. For some reason it just had you wanting to know more about it."

He couldn't help being reminded of the air of mystery that surrounded his own band in their early days. "It was like some cool private club – you knew there was something awesome going on there, but you weren't allowed in. I had to know more about it."

He began to message them to try to see what else he could find out. It was the start of the cat-and-mouse game that Swollen Teeth are now playing with the rest of the world.

"We weren't talking in sentences," says Sid. "It was more like, 'I'm watching you from the edge of the internet', and they would write back these weird little cryptic things. It developed into small conversations where I'd tell them that I couldn't not pay attention to them, that they had me, I'd been suckered in."

Even telling them who he was – "'I'm Sid from Slipknot!'" – didn't help. "Most bands would be putting that shit on their social media and wanting selfies and all that crap. They didn't give a fuck. Eventually when they knew I was really interested, they started sharing private links with me."

"MASKS ARE A FREE PASS TO BE A COMPLETE LUNATIC"
SID WILSON

That was point where he decided to get involved, offering to produce their debut EP. Once in the studio, keen to test the mettle of his new protégés, Sid put the band through what he describes as "the Ross Robinson boot camp": an excruciating regime designed to make Swollen Teeth the best band they could be.

"I made them pick a song and play it, and then stop at the exact point where I told them to, then change what they just played, go back, play it again and get the new parts right," he says. "Then when we had got the song correct, the way I wanted it, they'd go back and play it in full three times. Then we could move on to the next song and we'd do it again… and again. They were forced to push themselves mentally and physically like they never had before."

That arduous approach was worth it if the resulting *Swollen Teeth* EP is anything to go by. Its five tracks veer between thrash metal, beatdown hardcore, ambient electronics, jagged noise rock and goth-tinged melodrama, while always remaining as black and dense as tar. Their lyrics swing between self-laceration (*"Take my heart out/This is the end of me,"* sings Meega on *SWOLLENTEETH*) and nihilisim (*"Red light! Which one of us is next?!"* he screams on *Car Crash*), evoking the spirit of Slipknot.

"I'm not chasing the dragon to find something that can replicate Slipknot," says Sid. "If you come to them looking for that you're looking for the wrong thing, but they have the passion and the hunger and the vision to make something that is needed in music. Not just good, but necessary."

As someone who has known Sid Wilson since the days of Slipknot's explosive debut, Ross Robinson long ago learned to trust his friend's instincts. When Sid told Ross about his new discovery, his enthusiasm was infectious. After listening to Swollen Teeth's music, the producer was equally excited.

"We chase fire," says Ross, "and there was something about the simplicity of this band. Yet the way the drums sit with the riffs and Sid's production, it becomes very complex. They had this simplicity that communicated to the cells in your body, and that's a very special thing."

Ross experienced the strangeness that surrounded the band first-hand when he flew to New York to see his first Swollen Teeth show.

"Their manager tried to get me to sign an NDA [Non-Disclosure Agreement], so that I couldn't say who they were or what they look like," he says, grinning. "Whoever it was that I met, they wouldn't tell me what town they were from or what bands they had been in."

"They made Ross wear a mask when he turned up to the show," adds Sid, roaring with laughter. "Because they didn't want this super-famous producer, 'godfather of nu metal' anywhere near them. They don't want the notoriety. Most bands would be on Instagram Live: 'We're hanging out backstage with Ross! Check us out, man!' They do not care about that shit."

Messing with the head of one of the most successful producers in modern metal could have seriously backfired on Swollen Teeth. Instead, this brazen move appeared to have the desired effect. Ross signed the band to Blowed Out, the label he recently started with trap-metal iconoclast Eric 'Ghostemane' Whitney and Bill Armstrong, founder of US punk label SideOneDummy. Such is his belief in Swollen

PRESS

Swollen Teeth: get excited, people

Teeth that he's rearranged Blowed Out's schedule so the EP will be the label's very first release.

"It's really cool that this unintentional unfolding of events, with Sid finding them, turning them on to me and me turning them on to Ghostemane and Bill and the label, happened in this way," says Ross. "We actually started the label for a different band, but this one just steamrolled the first one. Sometimes you can't contain things. The boulder was already rolling, and we just had to go with it."

Of course, the combination of high-profile backers and the general air of mystery surrounding Swollen Teeth has prompted several online sleuths to attempt to find out the real identities of the band. One of the most persistent – and believable – rumours is that it's all a ruse, and Swollen Teeth is actually a Sid Wilson side-project, which may or may not feature Ghostemane as well. So, Sid, is it?

He and Ross erupt in fits of laughter. When it subsides, Sid sternly addresses us.

"I'm not even going to answer that because the answer is already out there," he says. "If you're asking me that question it would appear that you haven't done your research. Everything you need to know about that is available to you, so if you want to know, maybe go find out for yourself."

Excellent. That's cleared that up, then.

Irrespective of who they might be, Swollen Teeth are part of a bigger, if unconnected movement in metal: that of Bands Wearing Masks. It's not a new trend – Slipknot themselves helped spark it off in the late 1990s – but it's impossible to move these days without running into a bunch of musicians with their faces covered, whether it be Sleep Token, Slaughter To Prevail or Ghost. It's an approach Ross Robinson, for one, welcomes.

"There's a mystique and a true wisdom in not giving it up," he says. "I think it's so needed in the world. Everybody wants to be seen and to promote, but that's why Sid and I are doing this interview right now – to keep them anonymous. It's really fun. It's kinda like you have to take a Covid test before you can come in."

How long Swollen Teeth will be able sustain the mystery remains to be seen. "When it gets bigger then maybe they will come out and speak, but believe this: it'll be on their terms," says Sid, shrugging.

For now, preserving the element of mystery is the aim with Swollen Teeth. After talking to Sid and Ross, we're no closer to unravelling to who they are or what the real story is. One thing that is for certain is that it's uncannily reminiscent of the early days of Slipknot.

"The energy is there for sure," says Sid, a man better placed than most to make that comparison. "I've thought plenty of times there might not be another band that is in that energy field, not giving a shit about anything else outside of the music and the performance, but they're a kick-ass band giving everything they got. They just happen to be wearing masks. It's not a gimmick, it's the complete opposite – it's a free pass to be a complete lunatic. And they are out of control, completely. They've given up complete control to the art and the music. It's its own living, breathing creature."

That boulder is rolling down the hill, gathering speed. Best get behind it while you still can. MH

SWOLLEN TEETH'S SELF-TITLED EP IS OUT ON APRIL 26 VIA BLOWED OUT RECORDS

SUR
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ANARCHY IN THE UK!

Mohawks, teargas and slam-dancing: how Brit-punk riot-starters Discharge, GBH and The Exploited changed metal forever

WORDS: RICH HOBSON

In 1983, Anthrax guitarist Scott Ian saw a band that changed his life. Growing up in New York, he'd been aware of punk since the arrival of the Ramones, but heard enough horror stories about what the punks would do to "longhairs" that he decided to avoid the city's legendary CBGB's. That all changed when The Exploited came to town. Scott was a big fan of the Scottish band's 1982 album *Troops Of Tomorrow*, and he headed to downtown Manhattan club The Great Gildersleeves with then-Anthrax singer Neil Turbin and bassist Dan Lilker to see the band play and watch anarchy unfold.

"The Exploited came on and the crowd erupted into what I soon found out was called slam-dancing; I'd never seen anything like it!" Scott says now. "All these punks and skinheads losing their minds and stagediving, it was very physical and I was blown away. I wanted to go down and get into it, but Neil grabs me and is like, 'You don't wanna do that – they don't like longhairs!'"

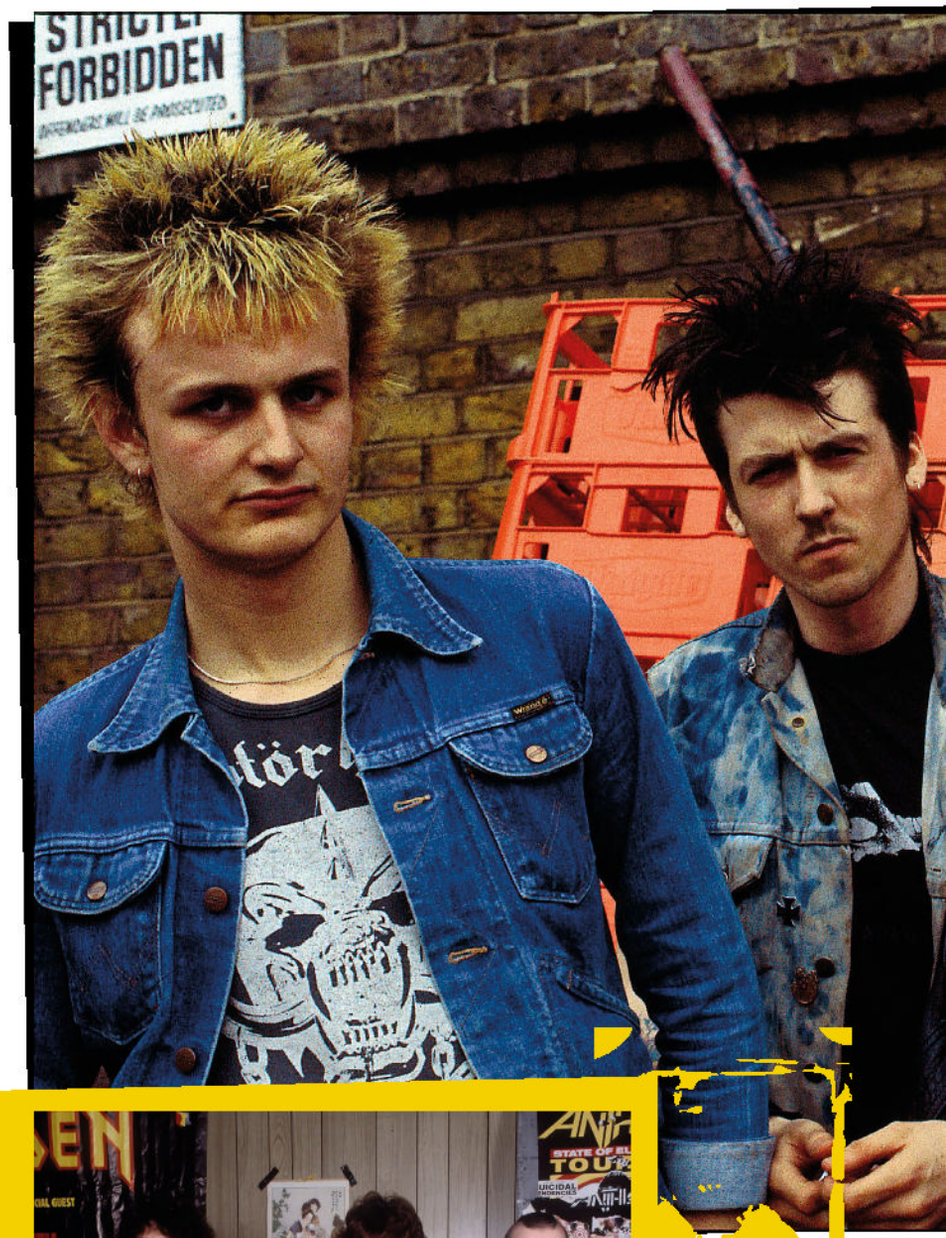
Hopped up on aggro and sporting foot-high mohawks, The Exploited and kindred spirits Discharge and GBH led a wave of bands who took punk and made it heavier, faster and more brutal. This movement – retrospectively dubbed UK82, after an Exploited song of the same name – would be a huge influence on the nascent thrash and extreme metal movements that followed, inspiring everyone from Anthrax and Metallica to Napalm Death, Neurosis and countless bands around the world today.

"When I was 12 I was searching for something that would inspire me and help release the aggression I had inside," says Anastasiya Khomenko, drummer with Ukrainian hardcore newcomers Death Pill. "I discovered The Exploited, GBH and Discharge around the same time – I heard [Discharge album] *Never Again* and since then I've always been very close to fast punk music. It was amazing: raw, aggressive, fast… what else do you need when you're 14?"

At the end of the 70s, punk was in bad shape. The scene's founding fathers had either split up (Sex Pistols) or were moving away from their original fast and furious sound (The Clash, The Damned). The New Wave Of British Heavy Metal had repurposed punk's DIY spirit, and was producing its own heroes in the shape of Saxon, Def Leppard and Iron Maiden.

The news of punk's impending demise clearly hadn't reached Edinburgh when The Exploited formed in 1979. Fronted by Wattie Buchan, an ex-squaddie with an enormous red mohican and a Scottish accent that bordered on indecipherable, their defiantly titled debut album, 1981's *Punk's Not Dead*, plastered football-terrace chants over high-speed, ultra-aggro beats.

A couple of hundred miles south in Stoke-on-Trent, Discharge were similarly upping the ante. "In the early days Discharge were basically a Sex Pistols cover band," explains guitarist Tony 'Bones' Roberts, who co-founded the band in 1977. But as the band's line-up changed, so too did its sound. "It was like a new band once [singer]



New York's finest, Anthrax, in 1989, with Scott Ian, right

GETTY

GBH in 1982 (left to right): Andrew 'Wilf' Williams, Ross Lomas, Colin 'Jock' Blyth, Colin Abrahall

GETTY

"IT SOUNDED LIKE THE APOCALYPSE"

ANTHRAX'S SCOTT IAN

Cal joined. We started playing faster and our sound just became harder as a result."

GBH formed the following year in Birmingham – specifically in The Crown, the same pub that hosted Black Sabbath's early gigs. "Everyone that went to The Crown was trying to form a band, but we carried through with it," GBH singer Colin Abrahall recalls. "We'd run everything through this one amp and [original GBH drummer] Wilf hadn't got a full drum-kit, so he'd tap along on an electric fire! We played faster because it hid the mistakes."

The sound the three bands eventually developed had as much in common with Motörhead's grimy, forceful noise as it did the Sex Pistols or The Clash's snotty broadsides, yet the wider punk and metal scenes were like oil and water, each eyeing the other with disdain and sometimes violence, though a few brave souls did occasionally cross the line.

"There were always a few metal fans at our gigs, even in the early days," says Bones with a laugh. "The brave ones."

PUNK'S NOT DEAD!

The times metal bands bowed to their punk forebears

METALLICA – SO WHAT
Originally released as the B-side to *The Unforgiven*, Metallica's beefed-up take on the Anti-Nowhere League's explicit anthem earned them a ban from MTV when they played it at the 1996 Europe Music Awards. Punk AF.

HYPOCRISY – THEY LIE
Sweden's Hypocrisy might be best known for their low'n'slow melodic death metal, but their cover of The Exploited's *They Lie* is a blistering blitzkrieg that does the Scottish band proud.

DESTRUCTION – CITY BABY ATTACKED BY RATS
Proof that the dividing line between thrash and UK82 is almost nonexistent, Teutonic thrashers Destruction's take on the GBH classic basically changes nothing and still feels incendiary.

MR. BUNGLE – FUCK THE USA
Mr. Bungle's first single in 21 years was a surprisingly straight-laced cover of The Exploited classic *Fuck The USA*, with Mike Patton drafting in Dave Lombardo and Scott Ian for extra thrash points.

NAPALM DEATH – WAR'S NO FAIRYTALE
Napalm Death laid the crust on thick with their gloriously rampant cover of Discharge's *War's No Fairytale*. Possibly the only band that could be nearly as sonically repulsive as the original.

SLAYER & ICE-T – DISORDER
Hip hop and metal collided on the *Judgment Night OST*, but Slayer and Ice-T threw some spicy UK82 into the mix with a triple-serving of Exploited's *War*, *UK82* and *Disorder* blended into one thrash supercut.

BENEDICTION – SEEING THROUGH MY EYES
Members of Benediction were part of the original UK82 scene, and their death metal rendition of Broken Bones' *Seeing Through My Eyes* shone a spotlight on their roots.

MACHINE HEAD – THE POSSIBILITY OF LIFE'S DESTRUCTION
How do you make Machine Head sound even heavier and more incendiary? By letting them loose on a Discharge cover, of course – Robb Flynn breaking out his best Cal Morris impression.

ANTHRAX – PROTEST AND SURVIVE
It turns out if you chuck Anthrax at a Discharge cover, the end result sounds like something more in keeping with Sepultura or Slayer: all muscular grooves and neck-breaking beats.

SLAYER – SICK BOY
Slayer are no strangers to speed, but they've never sounded snottier or more anarchic than on this GBH cover, taken from their '96 covers album, *Undisputed Attitude*.

Where punk's original poster boys swung between nihilism and rebellious posturing, The Exploited, Discharge and GBH were fuelled by frustration and anger at the state of the world around them.

"Birmingham was an industrial city that'd just got out of the three-day weeks… power cuts, lots of unemployment. It was a rough, tough place," Colin recalls. "Getting off the bus, you could be attacked by a gang of skinheads, bikers or straights. It was hairy."

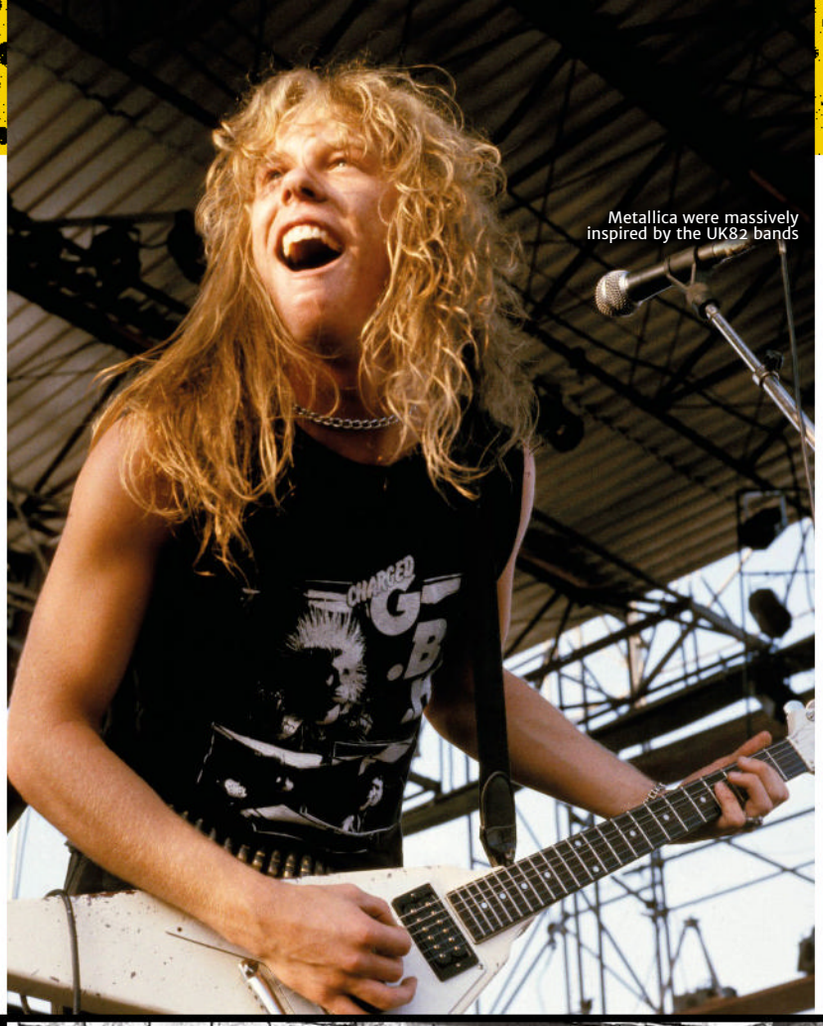
Unsurprisingly, disdainful major labels kept these spiky-haired hooligans at arms' length. Instead, it was down to independent UK labels like the London-based Secret (which released The Exploited's debut) and Stoke-On-Trent's Clay to unleash this snarling noise on the world. Both GBH and Discharge were signed to Clay, the latter after label founder Mike Stone saw an audience member throw a slab of beef at the band during a show in Stoke.

Released in April 1981, Discharge's EP *Why?* was a cacophony of feedback, proto-blastbeats and infuriated howls, cramming 10 tracks into a little under 15 minutes and reaching No.1 in the UK Independent Charts. That same month, The Exploited's debut *Punk's Not Dead* reached No.20 in the official charts, earning the band an invitation onto *Top Of The Pops* for a memorable performance of the song *Dead Cities*. Wattie later joked that The Exploited "were probably the only band to sell less records after [our] appearance".

Suddenly, provincial towns and cities up and down the country had their own clique of kids with Exploited-style mohicans and Discharge logos painted on the back of their jackets: Vice Squad and Chaos UK from Bristol, Anti-Nowhere League from Tunbridge Wells, Derby's Anti-Pasti, and so on.

In December 1981 The Exploited and GBH played together at Leeds' Queens Hall, sharing the bill with the Anti-Nowhere League and punk pioneers The Damned, as well as US hardcore trailblazers Black Flag.

"It was the first time we met Americans and realised there was stuff happening out there too," Colin says. "There were thousands of people there, all going wild. The whole world seemed punk!"


Metallica were massively inspired by the UK82 bands

Discharge: faster, harder, more brutal. Fuck, yes

If 1981 had been a formative year for the new punks, 1982 was the year everything exploded. The Exploited's second album, *Troops Of Tomorrow*, upped the speed and aggression of its predecessor, while GBH and Discharge both released landmark debut albums in the shape of *City Baby Attacked By Rats* and *Hear Nothing See Nothing Say Nothing*.

"*Hear Nothing See Nothing Say Nothing* had a huge impact on Anthrax, Slayer and Exodus," says Scott Ian. "There was a level of intensity, aggression and brutality that was unlike anything we'd ever heard. Those short bursts of anger, those sparse lyrics… it sounded like the apocalypse."

Off the back of these albums, the bands made their way over to the US, which had a thriving punk scene of its own in hardcore. As wild as their shows in the UK had been, the US was a whole other world. "There were some mad gigs," Colin says. "We played one place and the security were these old military guys still in uniform! But whenever anyone would get onstage, a lot of venues would cut the PA off and drop the fire curtain."

The Exploited fared even worse – more than one gig ended prematurely after tear gas was fired into the venue. Still, at least they got to play. "There were times we'd turn up to a venue and the promoter would just say, 'It's been called off, go home,'" says Discharge's Bones.

The gigs that *did* happen certainly left an impression on those that witnessed them. Just as Scott Ian had seen The Exploited in New York, Dave Lombardo of up-and-coming young thrashers Slayer saw GBH play at the venue Madame Wong's West.

"METALLICA WOULD TAKE US TO THE PUB"

DISCHARGE'S BONES

"The GBH gig really felt like what we [Slayer] wanted to do," Dave tells *Hammer*. "The aggression, the anger, the conviction that you'd play your music with… there wasn't anything pretentious about it. It was a bunch of street kids into music, pissed about society, about home and whatever. As a drummer I was realising I needed to step up if I was going to keep up with these bands."

He wasn't the only fresh-faced thrasher in the audience that night, however. "When we got to San Francisco,

HETFIELD: GETTY. DISCHARGE: PRESS.

Big John Duncan and Walter 'Wattie' Buchan of The Exploited in 1981

Slayer (pictured here in 1986) were rather fond of fast and heavy tunes

Metallica came along to see us," Colin remembers. "We got quite friendly with them. Three years later we were rehearsing in Birmingham and Metallica ended up rehearsing right next door to us for this massive tour they'd got booked. They'd take us to the pub at dinner time!"

As thrash bloomed in the 80s, the UK punk scene that had helped inspire it began to wane. GBH soldiered on, as did The Exploited, although Wattie remained the sole constant member. Bones left Discharge in 1982 to form Broken Bones; four years later his old band released the infamous *Grave New World* album, which saw singer Cal adopt a high-pitched wail plucked straight from the Sunset Strip – something that didn't go over well with their existing fans.

"There was a famous time when Discharge played The Ritz [in New York in 1986], and HR from Bad Brains dumped a whole can of garbage on Cal onstage because he hated their new sound so much!" recalls Scott Ian.

Discharge took the hint and split in 1987, but a resurgence of interest in the 1990s from the likes of Sepultura, Slayer and Metallica – who covered *Free Speech For The Dumb* on 1998's *Garage Inc.* – saw three-quarters of their *Hear Nothing See Nothing Say Nothing* line-up reunite in 2001. GBH stayed the course, releasing a steady string of albums over the years, as did The Exploited, although their last release was 20 years ago, 2003's *Beat The Bastards*. All three bands still gig regularly today – even two onstage heart attacks in the last decade can't stop The Exploited frontman Wattie in his tracks.

"There are hundreds, if not thousands, of fans all over the world, playing covers of their songs and getting tattoos in honour of the musicians," Death Pill vocalist Mariana Navrotskaya says of the original UK82 bands. "We're talking about a large-scale influence on the modern music scene: at a minimum, these bands still get thousands of people to their shows each year, which shows their importance."

"Everything's come full circle and we even see parents bringing their kids," says Discharge's Bones. "Metallica came to see us one night before they played London. They got a quiet table away from the rabble and you could see them headbanging all night. Later, they went over to the merch to ask if there were any free shirts and the girl working it had no idea who they were. She said, 'You can pay for them like everybody else!'" H

DISCHARGE PLAY DESERTFEST IN MAY

GETTY

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EDITED BY: JONATHAN SELZER • PICTURE: KATJA OGRIN

Metallica look back on a traumatic rite of passage

METALLICA

72 Seasons

BLACKENED RECORDINGS

California's metal megastars seek out a personal route to redemption

IT'S WORTH TAKING a moment to compose yourself before listening to *72 Seasons*, the new album from the biggest metal band of all time, so you won't fall prey to a knee-jerk reaction. Hardcore Metallica fans have long wanted to hear a return to the fire of those hallowed first four records, and to shout their excitement from the rooftops. Instead, their disappointment has led to some unfair criticisms of the band, especially about their post-*St. Anger* material.

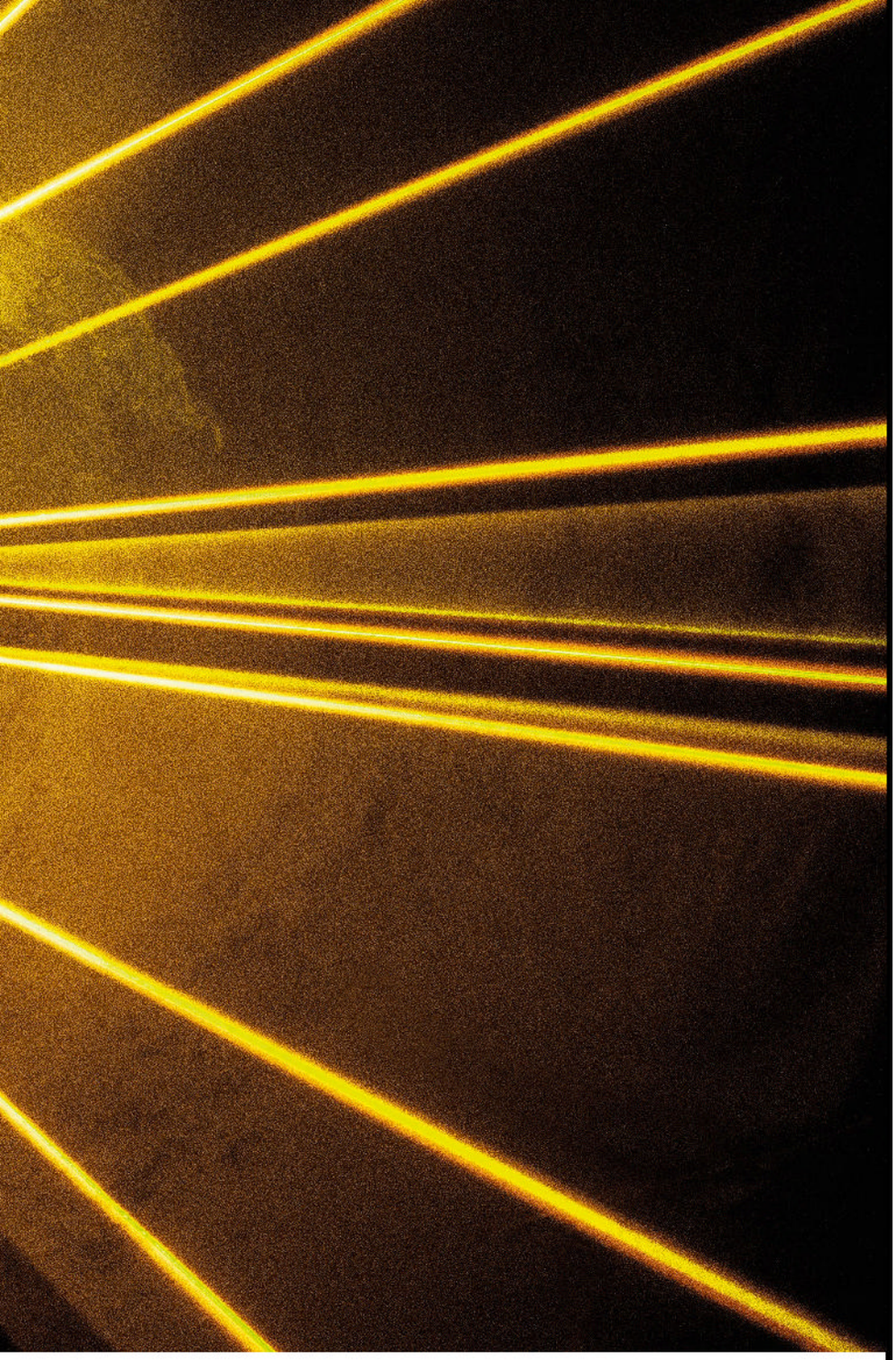
Yes, Metallica have had serious wobbles, such as the critical mauling of 2011's *Lulu*. They've also given us moments of pure class, like *Moth Into Flame* from 2016's *Hardwired... To Self-Destruct*, which is now worthy of classic 'Tallica status. But for most of this millennium, they've simply been an agreeably solid metal band – which is broadly how they come across on *72 Seasons*. Even having to listen from the comfort of a record company office, it's clear that it would be far more unsatisfactory were it not for James Hetfield, the undoubted man of the match here. He's always provided the emotional pull for Metallica, but rarely, if ever, has he laid himself as bare as he does here.

RARELY, IF EVER, HAS HETFIELD LAID HIMSELF AS BARE AS HE DOES HERE

The album's title refers to the first 18 years of a person's life, and James has dug deeper into his early trauma on this record than ever before. *'Lost his way through wicked streets, but he is someone's little boy, all the love a young one needs, thoughtless elders have destroyed',* he sings on *Chasing Light*. It's genuinely moving to hear him confront and wrestle with this period of his life with such candour.

The snarling, bawling, heavy metal master James Hetfield is still here, particularly on the full-throttled Motörhead homage, *Lux Æterna* – a track that gives the album a much-needed

PRESS/TIM SACCENTI



rocket boost. But he does so much more on 72 *Seasons*, crooning in pain, barking with regret, singing with defiance and displaying a dynamic range that the music Metallica have crafted can't match, maintaining a similar tone and pace throughout its 77-minute runtime.

The band can still nail their trademark massive, crunching, half-time, stadium metal in their sleep, and they do here on many occasions – *You Must Burn!*, *Screaming Suicide* and *Shadows Follow* are all likely to inspire millions of banging heads. Yet the lack of colour to accentuate James's stories becomes frustrating. Even if everyone accepts that Metallica aren't capable of the warp-speed thrash of their youth anymore, this is the band that wrote *The Unforgiven*, *Fade To Black* and *Bleeding Me*. They can do delicacy and elegance, and 72 *Seasons* desperately needs more dynamics to match James's light and shade. It's halfway through the epic, 11-minute closing track, *Inamorata* – the album's high point – before we get a clean guitar, alongside a bluesy break and some beautiful harmonies from Hetfield to close out, and Metallica sound all the more fantastic for it.

This deep into a career, it's hard to imagine many bands making their finest material. That Metallica have still found something new to say (if not play) deserves respect. They may not have delivered their very best, but they've given us the best we realistically could have hoped for.

FOR FANS OF: Black Sabbath, Motörhead, Corrosion Of Conformity

STEPHEN HILL

AD INFINITUM
Chapter III - Downfall
NAPALM

Swiss symphonic metallers don't forsake quality for quantity

With three albums in three years, you'd think that Ad Infinitum had bitten off more than they can chew. Remarkably, *Chapter III* is a stunningly accomplished record, with delectable hooks, sparkling production and gorgeous vocals from Melissa Bonny. Consistently a step beyond the formulaic, all 12 songs balance metallic dynamism with heart-swelling melodies without sounding contrived. *Ravenous* has shades of Eluveitie-esque folk metal while the excellent *Seth* nods to Evanescence, which only serves to highlight their songwriting ability. Nestled among chugging guitar grooves and technical breakdowns, *New Dawn*'s impossibly lovely chorus could melt even the iciest of hearts.

FOR FANS OF: Amaranthe, Eluveitie, Delain

CATHERINE MORRIS

ALTARI
Kröflueldar
SVART

Cerebral, psychedelic black metal from the land of ice, snow and lava

Like many Icelandic bands, Altari's native terrain has burned an indelible mark upon their creativity. But their take on black metal is one of slow deliberation and beguiling experimentation. Taking nine years to create and named after a nine-year-long period of volcanic eruptions, their debut conjures the underlying tension of living atop nature's ever-volatile crucible. The opening title track sets the tone, its dismal slow-burn building to abandon. It's louche psych-rock with BM traits. Tremolo-picked leads create unconventional clean/distorted contrasts, as the feral pace that usually accompanies craven howls is replaced with spaced-out jams. A bewitching trip of smouldering dynamics, *Kröflueldar* is the thinking person's black metal.

FOR FANS OF: Oranssi Pazuzu, Blut Aus Nord, Sólstafir

TOM O'BOYLE

ARCHETYPES COLLIDE
Archetypes Collide
FEARLESS

Arizona's eclectic debutants keep the anticipation at a constant

Archetypes Collide are aptly named; the quintet's debut mission statement is one of sonic collision. Twanging guitars and Imagine Dragons-esque radio-rock on *Paranoid & Paralyzed* clashes with the grin-inducing rush of riffs, drums and spine-tingling tension of *Suffocate Me*, yet the different flavours are tackled with equal measures of success. With the smorgasbord of textures at play, however, the shifts from frazzled retro synths to blistering electro-metalcore can sometimes leave you hanging – waiting for another burst of a soaring chorus, or one more breakdown rumble – but the sharp command of genres is impressive. A bold first step that hints at even greater things to come.

FOR FANS OF: The Amity Affliction, Beartooth, Palisades

EMILY SWINGLE

Dozer emphasise the 'thinking' part of 'forward-thinking'

DOZER

Drifting In The Endless Void

BLUES FUNERAL RECORDINGS

Sweden's resurrected desert/stoner rockers look beyond the dunes

PLAYING A CONSISTENT smattering of festival slots since returning from hiatus, Dozer have had a presence as a sort-of legacy band in recent years, courting the desert rockers who are still swooning over their split EP with Unida back in 1999. But when Covid-19 came along, these influential Swedes, crushed by isolation and cancelled gigs, hit the studio, resulting in their first fresh material in more than a decade.

Drifting In The Endless Void tells two stories. The first is a love letter to Kyuss, divulged through a wash of fuzzed-up licks and low-end rumble. Roaring opener *Mutation/Transformation* is a slice of the riffier end of Dozer's handiwork, proffering fiery licks, modulated vocals and explosive percussion. On *Ex-Human, Now Beast* the stoner runs deep, kicking off with *Paranoid*-aping riffs as Fredrik Nordin's distinctive vocals give a gravelly, grungy tone to the track. Elsewhere, California's dusty climes are embodied by *Andromeda*'s languid concoction of crashing cymbals and beat-up amps that insinuate a more pain-stricken representation of the desert you'll find in John Garcia and co's catalogue.

The second part of Dozer's tale is their ability to evolve beyond the traditional leanings of desert rock. Borrowing from their jammier moments, *Drifting In The Endless Void* experiments with retrospective textures: from the psychedelic interlude on *Dust For Blood* where a Bono-sounding Fredrik transports us to a backdrop of hallucinogenic haze and lava lamps, through the thumping, tumbling cathartic release of *No Quarter Expected, No Quarter Given*, to *Missing 13*'s space-age balladry. With the inclusion of two members from psych groovers Greenleaf – guitarist Tommi Holappa and crushing new drummer Sebastian Olsson – the spirit of new-wave fuzz, albeit at the noisier end, is all the more potent, making *Drifting In The Endless Void* a genuinely forward-thinking take on stoner from this comeback band.

FOR FANS OF: Truckfighters, Spiritual Beggars, Fu Manchu

HOLLY WRIGHT

CRUACHAN

The Living And The Dead

DESPOTZ

Dublin's long-running Celtic metallers raise their banners high

Although Cruachan's concept and aesthetic was nailed in from their 1995 debut, their early promise was partly compromised by cheap production and gauche arrangements. The Dublin band have enjoyed gradual refinement and increased sophistication, mastering their craft through decades of concerted graft and rigorous stress-testing. This ninth album finds them waving their swords at the summit of the Celtic folk metal mountain, even though founding frontman Keith Fay is the only remaining member from 2018's *Nine Years Of Blood*. The conviction of Keith's new bandmates is attested by the versatility and dynamism animating these 12 songs, as well as by the topless kilted photoshoot.

FOR FANS OF: Skyclad, Eluveitie, Primordial

CHRIS CHANTLER

CULTURA TRES

Camino De Brujos

AJM / BLOOD BLAST

Surging Venezuelan post-sludge with extra Paolo

Nowhere is more passionate about heavy music than South America. Cultura Tres have that fiery devotion to crushing skulls coursing through their Venezuelan veins, and Sepultura bassist Paulo Jr. coming along for the ride on their fifth album is a neat bonus. *Camino De Brujos* brings together multiple styles to form a grotesque whole that kicks, spits and lurches its way inexorably forward. Often redolent of the atonal churn of Godflesh, but rendered in grittier and more organic shades, songs like *19 Horas* and *Signs* use grooves to hammer home frontman Alejandro Londoño's phlegmy cries for justice. CT can also thrash when they want to; *Zombies* is half full-throttle speed metal sprint, half post-*Roots* sludge tsunami.

FOR FANS OF: Sepultura, Mass Worship, Will Haven

DOM LAWSON

DAWN OF OUROBOROS

Velvet Incandescence

PROSTHETIC

Progressive black metallers start their search for higher climes

On their second album, this Oakland quintet announce themselves as being one of the few bands deserving of the 'progressive' tag in 'progressive black metal'. Opener *Healing Grounds* instantly feels beamed in from a different genre, as clean guitar strums and Chelsea Murphy's croons echo atmospherically. Of course, the album goes on to quickly incorporate blastbeats, screeches and tremolo picking, but even then there's space for the Gojira-sized prog grooves of *Iron Whispers* and *Levitating Pacifics*'s post-rock ambience. The pieces are all there and, if DOO can forge tighter song structures and heftier hooks going forward, they could add the components needed to rocket the band to stardom.

FOR FANS OF: Arcturus, Ne Obliviscaris, Cradle Of Filth

MATT MILLS

PRESS

DESERT STORM
Death Rattle
APF

Oxford's progressive stoner road warriors rev up the engine

When lockdown forced this Oxford-bred proggy/stoner four-piece to stop touring, the road warriors got straight to work on the follow-up to 2020's acclaimed *Omens* album. Now in their 16th year, the UK underground heroes are ageing like a fine wine; their sixth full-length sees them raise the bar once again as they continue to explore their progressive side. Placing a stronger emphasis on dynamics than ever before, there's a marked growth in musicianship and song-writing throughout and a brief flirtation with Soundgarden-esque grunge on *Insomniac* too. *Cheyne Stoking* is a standout and the epic effort is a roller-coaster packed with crashing drums and crushing riffs. Don't be misled by the title, *Death Rattle* affirms there's plenty of life left in Desert Storm.

FOR FANS OF: High On Fire, Orange Goblin, Steak

EDWIN McFEE

DOWNFALL OF GAIA
Silhouettes Of Disgust
METAL BLADE

Germany's atmospheric black metallers go back to the future

Downfall Of Gaia's sixth album sees the return of guitarist and founding member Peter Wolff, who left in 2015 to focus on his family. Alongside this change in personnel, *Silhouettes Of Disgust* seeks to explore the band's roots 'without taking a step back'. Broadly it works, although whether such a change was necessary after the well-received *Atrophy* and *Ethic Of Radical Finitude* is up for debate. *Existence Of Awe* begins proceedings in typical DOG style, before vocals from Lulu Black (This Is Oblivion) and gloomy atmospherics make it truly sing. Frosty tremolo picking ensures that *Unredeemable* soars to an uplifting conclusion that benefits greatly from some new romantic-style guitars. There's nothing particularly new under the sun here, but *Silhouettes...* sees the atmospheric black metallers continue to operate proficiently and dexterously within a subgenre that continues to push boundaries.

FOR FANS OF: Wolves In The Throne Room, Fall Of Efrafa, Svalbard

REMFRY DEDMAN

FOR THE FALLEN DREAMS
For The Fallen Dreams
ARISING EMPIRE

Metalcore heavies recalibrate for the radio-friendly frequencies

Don't expect a return to these Michigan veterans' first two albums here. It's been 15 years since For The Fallen Dreams' heavier first album, *Changes*, and five years since their last album, *Six*, with its stadium-rock clean vocals and nu metal influences. This seventh release addresses a new audience entirely. Still, despite the uncomfortable *Hollywood Undead* rap-metal influences, there are some good riffs, interesting industrial glimpses and welcome heavy sections, even in predominantly radio-friendly tracks like *No Heaven*. The production is polished, the likeable combination of dreamy melodic and more aggressive metal remains, and *Without You* and *Suprapersonal* have satisfying guitar solos and a powerful mix of vocals. Chad Ruhlig also boasts some solid cleans and the songwriting is memorable, albeit polarising in parts.

FOR FANS OF: Killswitch Engage, Demon Hunter, Slipknot

NIK YOUNG

FORCEFED HORSEHEAD
Monoceros
OWLRIPPER RECORDINGS

Eclectic Norwegians scorch their way through the extreme landscape

This Norwegian quintet describe themselves as 'grindpunk', but that doesn't do justice to the corrosive mixture of metals black and death, hardcore punk, post-rock and sludge elements that bleed through their album. It's an eclectic stew that manages to coalesce with ease. *The Black Sun* condenses Neurosis's neutron star-collapsing heaviness into six and a half minutes, while *Every Death You Take* and *Iri* evoke the boisterous black'n'roll fun of Kvelertak. *Unending Appetite* and *In A Rut* whizz by in a little over three minutes, but *Monoceros* culminates in the nine-and-a-half-minute *...And Then There Were None*, which calls to mind some of Converge and Chelsea Wolfe's *Bloodmoon* project. An eclectic journey through extreme metal subgenres that shouldn't be ignored.

FOR FANS OF: Kvelertak, Neurosis, The Good The Bad And The Zugly

REMFRY DEDMAN

Grave Pleasures: great at everything bar navigating escape rooms

GRAVE PLEASURES
Plagueboys
CENTURY MEDIA

Post-punk pace-setters return to reclaim the throne

EIGHT YEARS AFTER the release of the first Grave Pleasures album, *Dreamcrash*, the influence of post-punk on contemporary rock has never been more apparent. Chuck a Bauhaus CD out of the window, and you will almost certainly hit someone wearing a Joy Division t-shirt, if not one promoting one of the countless bands currently obsessed with the bleak, industrial fag-end of the 70s and the gothic glories that came soon after. Always sharper than the average new wave revisionists, Grave Pleasures have conjured a third full-length that casually confirms that no one does this stuff better.

If *Dreamcrash* was the flawed but feisty debut and 2017's *Motherblood* the righteous, potential-fulfilling follow-up, *Plagueboys* is the moment when everything comes together for Kvohst and his Finnish chums. The band's sound remains rooted in the glowering intimacy of gothic rock, but this is a much more diverse and adventurous set, and more in keeping with post-punk's endless malleability as a result.

For those who have worshipped at this altar since Grave Pleasures' previous incarnation as Beastmilk, there's plenty of the darkly sexy rock'n'roll that defined that era. *Disintegration Girl* is a tense, tumultuous opener, set to a motorik beat and smothered in twangy guitar; *When The Shooting's Done* rattles along at a similar pace, before blossoming into a momentarily uplifting chorus; *Society Of Spectres* combines a rampaging wall of guitars with bursts of ghostly synth-pop.

Elsewhere, the formula is taken for several unexpected joyrides. *High On Annihilation* employs primitive drum machines to lethal effect; *Heart Like A Slaughterhouse* wrings fresh eeriness from the angular anti-funk of Gang Of Four; and *Lead Balloons* is a kohl-eyed, icy-hearted ballad and a simply magnificent piece of songwriting. They may no longer be ahead of their time, but Grave Pleasures are still firmly ahead of the rest.

FOR FANS OF: Killing Joke, Gospelheim, Savages

DOM LAWSON

PRESS

Healthyliving refuse to take the easy sonic route

HEALTHYLIVING

Songs Of Abundance, Psalms Of Grief

LA RUBIA PRODUCCIONES

Gothic-tinged explorations from beyond the gene boundaries

IT SHOULDN'T REALLY be too surprising that a new project featuring members of Maud The Moth and Ashenspire – two distinctive, standalone acts in their own right – is also an outlier entity, yet Healthyliving *still* manage to subvert expectations.

Songs Of Abundance, Psalms Of Grief occupies the liminal, frequently fascinating zone known to fans of modern rock music as "umm, post-something?" It presents a sprawling, neither-fish-nor-foul amalgam of sound that chucklingly muddles genre boundaries and invents its own strange folk knowledge. Grunge-y, *Vitalogy*-esque melodies hobnob with a baroque and undeniably gothic sense of drama, while the uncanny post-rock of Slint makes spidering forays to the base of your spine.

Bloom seems to channel and warp Katatonia's *Tonight's Decision*, *Back To Back* transmogrifies laidback jazziness into a brief, dappled patch of Explosions In The Sky grandiosity, and *To The Gallows* feels like Isis stripped of distortion and left with a bare, skeletal frame to protect them from the elements.

For all the subtle wrongfooting, the music laid down by guitarist/bassist Scott McLean and drummer Stefan Pötzsch is tasteful, apposite and always engaging, despite its refusal to take the easy or obvious path. The real wildcard, however, comes in the presence of Amaya López-Carromero. Her voice slips from vapour-trail calm to world-ending power as if it were the easiest thing in the world, and commands your full attention whether dealing in quiet, Cocteau Twins-esque whispers or going full-on gothic powerhouse.

If there are some occasional minor flaws to be found on *Songs Of Abundance, Psalms Of Grief*, even these suggest that there are reasons to be excited, since they imply there's plenty of time yet to grow, expand and explore. In the meantime, they've gifted us with an album that does their name proud – one that raises the pulse, exercises the mind and nourishes the spirit.

FOR FANS OF: **Ides Of Gemini, Maud The Moth, Made Out Of Babies**

ALEX DELLER

FORETOKEN

Triumphs

PROSTHETIC

Virginian duo offer another lesson in epic, windswept violence

Two people can make one hell of a din, and Foretoken proved as much on their 2020 debut, *Ruin*. Purveyors of an avowedly ambitious take on frosty, melodic death metal, with a symphonic streak a mile wide, the Virginian duo have gone for broke on their big label follow-up. *Triumphs* sounds heroic and spiteful in equal amounts. *Demon Queller* and *Devil O' The Sea* owe a significant debt to the pioneering bombast of Dimmu Borgir and Wintersun, but Foretoken avoid the time-worn clichés. Instead, they have skewed melodic sensibilities and a neat sense of the perverse; the epic *A Tyrant Rises As Titans Fall* is a brutal, blackened riot, but laced with trippy diversions and moments of classic metal abandon.

FOR FANS OF: **Wintersun, Dimmu Borgir, Thulcandra**

DOM LAWSON

HALIPHRON

Prey

LISTENABLE

Dutch newcomers get their symphonic ducks in a row

With undeniable tinges of Dimmu Borgir's *Death Cult Armageddon*, Haliphron's debut album takes symphonic extreme metal's high bar and hangs a theatre curtain from it, setting up shop on the West End. But for all the grandeur and thespian sensibilities, *Prey* also proves the Dutch newcomers are canny when it comes to 'I can't believe it's not Cradle' songwriting, delivering a sense of pomp and fun that reminds us why those bands were such vital forces at the turn of the millennium. They might not have a *Progenies...* or a *Her Ghost In The Fog* yet, but the epic compositions of *Perfect Existence*, *The Resistance* and the title track suggest such anthems could well be within Haliphron's grasp.

FOR FANS OF: **Dimmu Borgir, Cradle Of Filth, Hecate Enthroned**

RICH HOBSON

ISAAK

Hey

HEAVY PSYCH SOUNDS

Italian stoner rockers add a stronger strain to their bowl

Coming off a seven-year break following their brilliantly titled debut, *The Longer The Beard The Harder The Sound*, and follow-up *Sermonize*, Isaak have taken a deeper dive into stoner rock. The Genoa quartet have upped the guitar muscularity and galvanic rhythmic energy, as featured in *Dormouse* and *OBG*, as well as the melodic Murray/Smith textures of *Fake It Until You Make It*. Crowning their increased pounding on the desert rock sand is the vocal acumen of Giacomo Boeddu. He tops the powerful slinkiness of *Rotten* and the marvellously anthemic title track with a crooning bellow that collides Danzig's crinkly forehead with John Garcia's leather lungs to see sky valley on the receiving end of a big ol' boot.

FOR FANS OF: **Kyuss, Red Fang, Orange Goblin**

KEVIN STEWART-PANKO

PRESS

JESUS PIECE
...So Unknown
CENTURY MEDIA

Philly metallic hardcore crew go all in on their second album

The second album from this talented Philadelphia metallic hardcore crew exceeds all expectations. Completely immersive, it also brilliantly brings to life the band's massive live presence. First single *Tunnel Vision* did a good job of painting the picture of this 28-minute barrage and *In Constraints* gets things off to an immense start with brutal vocals and great builds. Among other standouts, *An Offering To The Night* is deliciously harsh, *Fear Of Failure* is uplifting, *FTBS* gives a nod to early Machine Head, and *The Bond* forges order out of chaos. Jesus Piece started in 2015, but their songwriting is now as tight as their chemistry. Packed full of riffs, groove, pummelling aggression, and purposeful pauses, *...So Unknown* manages to be cerebral while obliterating eardrums, and it's a delight.

FOR FANS OF: **Code Orange, Knocked Loose, Left Behind**

NIK YOUNG

KEEP OF KALESSIN
Katharsis
MORNINGSTAR / BACK ON BLACK

Norwegian black metal veterans narrow their horizons

Although they formed in 1993 and have flirted with tech, symphonic and melodic death metal since, these black metallers almost conquered the Norwegian mainstream. In 2010, they came third in the contest to see who'd represent their homeland in Eurovision. On their first album in eight years, though, mastermind Obsidian C. and co zero in on the orchestral and thrash metal aspects of their repertoire. The result is some bombastic melodies, like on the title track and the choir-backed *The Omni*, but the persistence of the strings and lightspeed drumming quickly makes *Katharsis* a monotonous 49 minutes of music. The slog's especially egregious on the 10-minute *The Obsidian Expanse*, which dabbles in nothing new to justify its length. Considering this follows 2015's more progressively minded *Epistemology*, it's a bizarre backwards step.

FOR FANS OF: **Septicflesh Dimmu Borgir, Emperor**

MATT MILLS

LAMP OF MURMUUR
Saturnian Bloodstorm
ARGENTO

LA's buzz-generating black metallers broaden their horizons

Lamp Of Murmuurs's previous slew of demos, splits and albums have seen the LA entity's prolific mastermind M. channelling gloomy gothic undertones into his raw, chaotic vision for black metal. With *Saturnian Bloodstorm*, he's progressed beyond the coarse hostility of those releases into an expansive and mature new outlook that fuses pummelling Norwegian-style black metal with the fist-pumping hooks of classic metal. That isn't to say that LOM's animating hostility has lessened; within sprawling epics like *Seal Of The Dominator*, *Conqueror Beyond The Frenzied Fog* and the excellent *In Communion With The Wintermoon* lies an engrossing balance between pulverising riffs, dizzying tempos and dark, spiralling melodies not hinted at before. There's nothing dawn-of-creation new here, but *...Bloodstorm* captures an artist leaving the safety of the familiar and finding huge rewards on the other side.

FOR FANS OF: **Dissection, Immortal, Uada**

JOE DALY

LAMPR3A
ESnSE
ART GATES

Basque tech metallers are too sexy for this strapline

Why write one song when you can write three songs within a track? This was clearly the dilemma facing Basque Country's Lampr3a when they sat down to write their experimental debut proper, and on opener *Magla*, they've made their intentions clear. In the first four and half minutes, the trio's instrumental progressive metal veers sharply between sinister keyboards and labyrinthine thunder and into a passage of stark serenity, finishing with a guitar solo that dives and corkscrews around intricate riffery, all tighter than a gnat's arse. Having proven their musical adroitness over the course of an EP and several singles, this is the first time the band have put together a body of work, and it reads as a sensory, atmospheric journey. Not all the ideas work, however; the sex noises layered over elegant piano on *Rocd* are just plain awkward.

FOR FANS OF: **Vildhjarta, Uneven Structure, Chimp Spanner**

DANNII LEIVERS

SMALL MERCIES

Where EP is short for 'Epic Potential'

ATARKA
The Mountain
DEATH MASK

Combining groove-tinged rumbles, blazing blastbeats, blackened death metal growls and an appearance from Soilwork's Bjørn "Speed" Strid, this four-track EP is thunderously epic modern metal.

DANNII LEIVERS

SOFTCULT
See You In The Dark
EASY LIFE

These Canadian twins create a dazzling dream-pop and grunge-inflected stew. Lots of bands are experimenting with these elements, but only one are championed by Hayley Williams and Oli Sykes.

REMFRY DEDMAN

THE LOVECRAFT SEXTET
BlacktWhite
DEBEMUR MORTI PRODUCTIONS

In the wake of their *Miserere* album, these gnostic atmosphere engineers leach out two more exquisite jazz-noir shufflers, as a saxophone splits the prevailing fug crawl with lung-busting salvos of prime John Zorn-like intensity.

SPENCER GRADY

SUPERA MORZA
Supera Morza
MODERN SKY

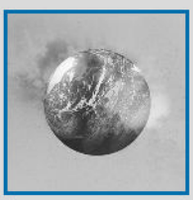
An extremely solid debut EP from this Manchester/Bolton quartet. The five tracks here encompass a plethora of styles. Although rooted in grunge, they also showcase punk, sludge and post-rock, a bit like Nirvana brought up on a diet of Kvelertak and Deftones.

ELLIOT LEAVER

SAVAGE HANDS
Rock Bottom
SHARPTONE

The Maryland rockers have yet another ambitious EP on their hands. Marrying big *'Whoa-oh-oh'* choruses with heavy grooves, furious breakdowns and defiant lyrics, *Rock Bottom* covers a lot of ground with flair.

CATHERINE MORRIS



WORLD GONE COLD
World Gone Cold
ROCKFEST

The debut EP from this Christian metal supergroup is polished, anthemic and accomplished. Think BMTH with an industrial edge and a dash of modern-era Architects, and you're on the right track.

DANNII LEIVERS

PRESS

Holy Moses helped lay the foundations for thrash

HOLY MOSES

Invisible Queen

FIREFLASH

Germany's Queen of Thrash bows out in style

WHEN IT COMES to pioneering women in heavy music, Sabina Classen is unquestionably near the top of the list. Holy Moses formed in 1980, and their frontwoman broke new ground the minute she first opened her mouth and let rip with one of her trademark screams. Alongside the more widely celebrated Kreator, Destruction, Sodom and Tankard, the Germans were an integral part of thrash metal's genesis and subsequent evolution in their native country.

It remains a crying shame that Holy Moses aren't a much bigger deal. Few bands from any era of thrash have released records as righteously berserk as 1986's *Finished With The Dogs* and 1989's *The New Machine Of Liechtenstein* and, to this day, Sabina's vocals are among the most thrillingly hostile in metal. Very firmly announced as the final Holy Moses album, *Invisible Queen* aims to bring the band's legacy to an end with all the subtlety of a wrecking ball smashing through your living room window.

As ever, the band's riffs are jagged, perverse and often closer to the tech-thrash of Mekong Delta than any of Germany's Big 4. Opener *Downfall Of Mankind* is particularly grand and extravagant, and showcases both a crushing, ultra-modern production and Sabina's ageless rasp. In contrast, *Cult Of The Machine* takes a serrated-edge swipe at technology's grip on humanity over some of the most chaotic and deranged riffs Holy Moses have written since the late 80s. The title track nails its spitefully melodic chorus to a skeleton of marauding grooves; *Alternative Reality* warps trad thrash tropes into a dissonant, blackened assault; and *Visions In Red* is unrelenting, evil thrash with Sabina in beast mode.

She sounds imperious throughout this closing statement, and with good reason. Holy Moses are bowing out at the peak of their powers, led by an iconic, game-changing woman. Queen is about right.

FOR FANS OF: Kreator, Crypta, Exodus

DOM LAWSON

LATE NIGHT VENTURE

V: Bones Of The Extinct

TREPANATION RECORDINGS

High-concept post-metallers crash into a post-pandemic hellscape

Late Night Venture's cosmically minded post-metal has been streamlined on their latest release. Post-pandemic clarity was the inspiration here, the Danes manifesting righteous indignation at an unstable, mismanaged world. Coming off the back of a conceptual trilogy, the band have shortened tracks and made guitars/vocals the focus. Their predilection for analogue synths and field recordings remains, as ambience and colossal riffs collide on *Hostile Nature* and plunging, sci-fi keys and abyssal chug invoke the cosmic doom of *Armed Warrior*. Where previously LNV were lost in space, *V: Bones Of The Extinct* sees them come crashing down to Earth with newfound, focused rage.

FOR FANS OF: Russian Circles, Bossk, Vulture Industries

TOM O'BOYLE

LO!

The Gleaners

PELAGIC

Australia's metallic hardcore heavies bring some depth

Lo!'s fourth album of sludgy, discordant metallic hardcore picks up from where 2017's *Vestigial* left off. It's essentially more rapid, rabid, quickfire riffing, dizzying rhythmical complexities and gruesomely acerbic screaming – imagine a more thrash-tinged Converge with extra black'n'roll influences. For the most part, they mercilessly try to tear your face off, as on the likes of *Rat King* and *Salting The Earth*. But the more expansive material – the eight-minute-plus title track being the A-grade example – adds some excellent and much-needed dynamics à la KEN mode at their experimental best.

FOR FANS OF: KEN mode, LLNN, Herod

STEPHEN HILL

LORDI

Screem Writers Guild

ATOMIC FIRE

Anthology-themed antics from Finland's high-camp rock ghouls

If you're looking for slashing modern metal and buckets of gore, maybe check in with Ice Nine Kills. Lordi's hammy horror show is far more fang-in-cheek, with comedy vampire voice-overs, suitably horrifying puns and a *Tales From The Crypt*-style horror anthology theme pulling the whole thing together. Musically, too, the Finns are a little less extreme, with plenty of synth-drenched 80s rock moves clawing their way through songs with titles like *Unliving Picture Show* and *Lycantropical Island*. For the most part, *Screem Writers Guild* is big dumb fun, although closer *End Credits* takes a more personal tack with a swelling piano ballad looking back on Mr. Lordi's life and apparently intended for his funeral. Overall, it's B-movie quality, but sometimes that's all you need.

FOR FANS OF: Beast In Black, Alice Cooper, Wednesday 13

PAUL TRAVERS

PRESS

MÉLANCOLIA
HissThroughRottenTeeth
NUCLEAR BLAST

Australian blackened deathcore mob screw the pooch

Aussie upstarts Mélancolia might look like they've just been kicked out of their local goth club for having one snakebite and black too many, but their debut suggests no small amount of focus. *HissThroughRotten-Teeth* charges down the blackened deathcore path with gusto, snapping, snarling and writhing as though powered by pure malice. Chiggedy-chigga guitar parts come cloaked in lofty Cradle Of Filth orchestration, and if it often seems somewhat standard, there are hints – a dab of nu metal, some vintage NIN – of a broader palette. While it doesn't pack in everything they have to offer, opener *Horror Ethereal* will quickly tell you whether you'll love or hate it. Vitriolic angst and dynamism are given full rein, alongside a slightly squelchy production and vocals that sound like a small dog being violently twisted in half.

FOR FANS OF: Lorna Shore, Mire Lore, Carnifex

ALEX DELLER

MORK
Dypet
PEACEVILLE

Norway's rising black metal star maps out his own sonic trajectory

Over five albums, Mork mastermind Thomas Eriksen has established himself as a respected torchbearer for classic Norwegian black metal. Will he forever stand in tribute, or define his own legacy? Where 2017's breakthrough, *Eremittens Dal*, was dismissed by some as Darkthrone worship, sixth album *Dypet* ('The Abyss') broadens the musical horizons set out by 2021's *Katedralen*. Eriksen explores his innermost existential darkness with an expansive production and increased compositional ambition, retaining a grim, frostbitten aura while stepping further away from the 'traditional' sound. The hypnotic freneticism of *Et Kall Fra Dypet* contrasts effectively with undulating, layered centrepiece *Høye Murer*, featuring ex-Kvelertak vocalist Erlend Hjelvik. Eriksen also experiments with mournful synth on furiously paced closer *Tilbake Til Opprinnelsen*. *Dypet* continues to honour classic black metal, while forging a singular identity.

FOR FANS OF: Imperium Dekadenz, Kampfar, Taake

TOM O'BOYLE

MYSTIC CIRCLE
Erzdämon
FIREFLASH

Teutonic black metallers set their sights on the big stage

Having gone 16 years between albums, this German black metal duo were seemingly back in the studio before they'd even released last year's self-titled comeback. Clearly they have a huge backlog of riffs built up, but blink and you'll miss them as they plough through change after change, going from blastbeats to mid-paced riffs and back again in the blink of an eye. Some black metal aims to sound like human sacrifice in an incense-filled cave; Mystic Circle clearly have their eyes set on big festival stages. This is grandiose and catchy – like melodeath with added cloaks, and enough keyboards to warrant a velvet top hat. Not for the trve or kvlt, but *Erzdämon* will go down a storm with anyone who loves a Euromeal fest.

FOR FANS OF: Behemoth, Cradle Of Filth, Dimmu Borgir

ALASTAIR RIDDELL

NIGHT DEMON
Outsider
CENTURY MEDIA

West Coast retro metallers set out on a new sonic highway

Cajoling cult legends Cirith Ungol into reforming after 20-odd years would be sufficient to warrant Jarvis Leatherby an honorary knighthood. Factor in his exuberant power trio Night Demon, whose dandruff-shaking blue-collar trad metal infused with rock'n'roll spunk has lit up the underground for over a decade, and we're talking modern-day crown prince of heavy metal here. On this third LP – their first for six years and first for a major label – Night Demon have spread their wings, escaping the NWOBHM re-enactment time-warp to embrace a more versatile musicality, emotional sensitivity and compositional adventurousness. Such growth is always risky for a band from this retro niche, and some purists may be irked that *Outsider*'s catchy hard rock occasionally veers into Foo Fighters territory, but Jarvis deserves a bit of Grohl glory.

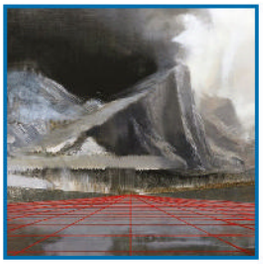
FOR FANS OF: Iron Maiden, Saxon, Diamond Head

CHRIS CHANTLER

Netherlands reckon the future is looking far from rosy

NETHERLANDS
Severance
SVART

Ever-evolving sludge duo get an all-star seal of approval



WHEN A BAND is name-dropped by bigger names, the assumption often is that they are an inscrutable, limited-appeal, musicians-only outfit. This NYC duo may be the listener's choice for Mastodon, Gojira and Dinosaur Jr., but appreciation of Timo Ellis and David Keith's work isn't impenetrable, it just takes a willingness to accept something different churning the gears. In fact, with *Severance* being their ninth release, Netherlands themselves are hardly the same band they were on their 2012 debut, *Fantasmatic*.

Where the past was dominated by baritone guitar crunch'n'sludge, Netherlands have continued to build upon the wiry 80s new wave, angular soundscapes, beehive bass buzz and Moog washes that have been a broader part of their more recent sonic palette. They move mountains with *Swimming Dog*, redefine prog with the title track and offer up a classic Rage Against The Machine sonic wardance with *Omisha*. They also make leftfield steps: *Sicarrivallio* sounds like The Locust covering the *Sicario* soundtrack, and *Silencio* pushes Motown through a Krautrock wringer.

A contradictory and gaping plotline is at work on *Severance*, however. The album thematically focuses on humanity hurtling towards extinction, discussing "the urgent need to return to values, traditions and rituals that restore our connection with the Earth… abolishing unchecked technological expansion, and halting the unnecessary pillaging of this planet's creatures and 'resources'". This, while embracing the advancements in computing power, electronic instrumentation, digital recording and power sucking amplification necessary for two people to make a glorious noise that sounds like it's emerging from an undiscovered dimension. But, if we're truly on the way out, *Severance* exists as an awesome soundtrack to our hubris-driven end.

FOR FANS OF: Big Business, Brutus, Lightning Bolt

KEVIN STEWART-PANKO

PRESS

OHHMS prove they're in this for the long haul

OHHMS
Rot
CHURCH ROAD

Progressive metallers uncover the human side of horror

OHHMS ARE ONE of a growing number of bands who have been giving progressive metal a contemporary shot in the arm. This explorative quintet have never been afraid of an overarching theme to their albums, with 2017's *The Fool* exploring the Tarot, and 2018's *Exist* casting its eye upon animal cruelty. On *Rot*, frontman Paul Waller gets to explore his love of horror, with B-movie titles such as *Eaten Alive*, an apocalyptic barnstormer with tribalistic drumming, and *Let's Scare Jessica To Death*, with its overdriven wall of fuzz and anthemic chorus. Such macabre material has been plundered countless times in metal circles before, but OHHMS approach it with a fresh ear.

Beginning appropriately with the sound of a VHS cassette being inserted into a player (ask your parents), *Rot* is a lot of fun, but like all the best horror, there's substance lurking under the festering carcasses. *Body Melt* may sound like a hip-shaking rager, but it lyrically deals with the eating disorders that consumed Paul's life for decades. Meanwhile, *A Dark Song* sees him reflecting on the death of his alcoholic father. Like Dario Argento, George A. Romero or even Jordan Peele, OHHMS use horror metaphors to mask chilling real-life concerns.

At no point does the album feel bogged down by these weighty issues, and if you were to give it a cursory listen, you'd be unlikely to pick up on the implication found in the chorus to *The Mephisto Waltz* (*'Roxanne / I found love in another man'*). OHHMS never lose their sense of fun with this entire project, even when the music itself turns dark. Even if you never quite know what you're going to get from a new OHHMS album, you can be assured that it will be quality, and on their fourth, the rot has yet to set in.

FOR FANS OF: King Gizzard & The Lizard Wizard, Boss Keloid, Torche

REMFRY DEDMAN

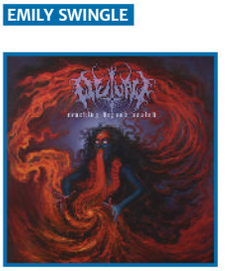
NOTHING,NOWHERE.
Void Eternal
ELEKTRA

Massachusetts' post-hardcore rapper turns to the dark side

With razor-sharp nu metal riffs and a bruising honesty, *Void Eternal* is nothing, nowhere.'s most intense release yet. A stunning shift from previous work, this record drowns Joseph Mulherin's emo-tinged trap and electro-pop punk in thick, black paint and heavier soundscapes. From *Psycho_Psychiatry*'s Linkin Park-tinged brutality through the oppressive, woozy tenderness of *Chromakill3r, to Thirst4Violence*'s visceral fusion of hip hop and screamo, *Void...* dissects and transforms emo through a slew of raw, accomplished sounds and star guests. Will Ramos growls on the anthemic *Trag3dy*, while Fall Out Boy's Pete Wentz unleashes spoken word on *Cyan1de*. An instant classic.

FOR FANS OF: Linkin Park, Static Dress, Silverstein

EMILY SWINGLE



OUTLAW
Reaching Beyond Assiah
AOP

Brazil's relocated black metallers stay rooted to the old school

Since forming in São Paulo in 2015, this blasphemous band have released a trio of LPs as members have relocated across Europe and Finnish drummer Tommi Tuhkala has joined the ranks. Here, Outlaw rededicate themselves to their uncompromisingly raw, corrosive black metal stripped to its vital essence. *The Unending Night* and *The Serpent's Chant* unleash grinding walls of blastbeats and distorted riffage that will cause the most diehard kvltists to frown with approval. There's some variety on tracks like *Beyond The Realms Of God*, which drizzle icy atmospherics into the mix, but overall, Outlaw's manifest aversion to experimentalism yields little to distinguish this from so many other traditional BM releases.

FOR FANS OF: 1349, Dark Funeral, Ragnarok

JOE DALY

OV SULFUR
The Burden Ov Faith
CENTURY MEDIA

Ex-Suffokate frontman unleashes his new deathcore arsenal

Given how much the now-defunct Suffokate were revered, it's no surprise that Ov Sulfur – the new, blackened deathcore outfit featuring the former's vocalist Ricky Hoover – have generated a lot of hype with just one EP to their name. As such, there's a fair amount riding on this debut album, but instead of bowing under the pressure, the record defiantly asks "What pressure?" With more breakdowns than you can shake a finger at, guest appearances by the likes of Howard Jones and Alex Terrible among others, and a number of the tracks showcasing some truly gorgeous keyboard backings, Ricky's creative revival following nine years spent in the musical wilderness is well and truly complete.

FOR FANS OF: Brand Of Sacrifice, Bonecarver, Enterprise Earth

ELLIOT LEAVER

WORLD SERVICE

Heavy metal uprisings from around the globe

DEPRAVED MURDER
Unethical Terrestrial Collapse
COMATOSE MUSIC

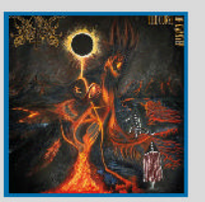
Depraved Murder pepper a textbook Indonesian death metal blastfest with wild, technical touches and flashes of old-school filth. A killer production doesn't hurt, either.

DOM LAWSON

TOMBSTONE
To The Existence Of Light
GUTTER PRINCE CABAL

Owing much to Sweden's mid-90s black metal hordes, this Indonesian duo's second album reeks of sulphurous intent with septic riffage and serrated arpeggios snagging like flesh on barbed wire.

SPENCER GRADY

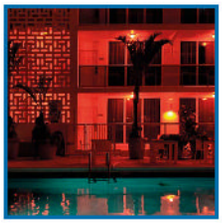


XALPEN
The Curse Of Kwányep
BLACK LODGE

Fronted by Watain live guitarist Tarem-Keláash, Santiago's Xalpen combine Swedish black metal and ice-cold riffing with snags of melody, all wrapped up in an esoteric mysticsm and an aura of nameless dread.

ALASTAIR RIDDELL

PRESS/ BENJAMIN BOWLES



REMOTE VIEWING
Modern Addictions
HUMAN WORTH

Ex-Palehorse members dig deeper into the sludge sediment

After rising from the ashes of London's Palehorse in 2018, Remote Viewing seem determined to take that band's sound to even sludgier places. This third album is arguably their most crushing yet. There are hints of post-hardcore on the cathartic *Wasted On Purpose* and morose Slint-on-steroids closer *A.B.B.A / ABBA*, and even a sardonic nose rock twang to the driving *Your Opinion Is Wrong* – featuring some bile-speckled guest vocals from Human Leather's Amée Chanter. But for the most part, *Modern Addictions* dwells in dank, despondent doom territory, like the crawling misery of *Watch Me For The Changes*. Bolstered by a booming production courtesy of Petbrick's Wayne Adams, it all sounds suitably humongous too; John Atkins' clanking bass feels like it's opening an inescapable sonic black hole when opener *Short Distance Runner*'s earth-rupturing groove kicks in.

FOR FANS OF: Palehorse, Harvey Milk, KEN mode

KEZ WHELAN

ROTTEN SOUND
Apocalypse
SEASON OF MIST

Finland's gods of militant grind on vintage form

With the obvious exception of the much-missed Nasum, no one has ever embodied grindcore's lust for the extreme with more vigour than Rotten Sound. The Finns have been destroying ears since the early 90s, but despite its creators' veteran status, *Apocalypse* may be the fastest and most insanely brutal thing they've ever recorded. From the opening seconds of *Pacify* onwards, listening to this is like being taken apart by machine-gun fire. Bolstered by the sound of drummer Sami Latva doing some serious overtime, 40-second blasts of pure aggro like *Equality* and *Ownership* butt skulls with *Sharing*'s ominous sludge and the wild, death-punk blitzkrieg of *Empowered*, and everybody leaves with a bloody nose. Twenty-one minutes of violence, and no fucking about, *Apocalypse* sounds huge, too. This is boss-level grind, executed by elite experts.

FOR FANS OF: Nasum, Wormrot, Lock Up

DOM LAWSON

SAXON
More Inspirations
SILVER LINING MUSIC

Barnsley's NWOBHM legends reveal yet more of their influences

With Saxon's 23rd studio album of original music, the excellent *Carpe Diem*, just over a year old, this second album of covers is possibly a little gratuitous. *Carpe Diem* was preceded by a first volume of *Inspirations*, with associated product also including a solo debut from Biff Byford and an album made with the singer's son Seb as Heavy Water. Now Saxon fans are asked to find their wallets… again? *More Inspirations* sees the veterans delve deeper into the sounds that set them on their path, and the choices from oldies like The Animals, The Sensational Alex Harvey Band, Cream and Nazareth are less obvious than those on its predecessor. These classic tunes obviously mean plenty to Saxon, whose performance levels remain as high as we have come to expect, but does the world *really* need another collection of remakes?

FOR FANS OF: Judas Priest, Accept, W.A.S.P.

DAVE LING

SHORES OF NULL
The Loss Of Beauty
SPIKEROT

Italy's gothic doommongers hatch an unexpected treat

Last winter, fans of blackened gothic doom merchants Shores Of Null received an early Christmas present when it was revealed the band would release a new album in 2023. Secretly written and recorded in tandem with their 2020 experimental third LP, *Beyond The Shores*, *The Loss Of Beauty* sees the gloom-loving Italians back to more familiar territory and sounding all the better for it. Described as an invitation to see the beauty in the little things, there's a lot to love here. Frontman Davide Straccione is in full-on god mode throughout, and both his clean vocals and growls are loaded with power and passion on the likes of *Nothing Left To Burn* and *The Last Flower*. Calling to mind *Icon*-era Paradise Lost, especially on anthem -in-the-making *A Nature In Disguise*. *The Loss Of Beauty* is a morose and often magnificent listen.

FOR FANS OF: Darkest Era, My Dying Bride, Paradise Lost

EDWIN McFEE

Overkill: still thrashin' with passion

OVERKILL
Scorched
NUCLEAR BLAST

Thrash veterans prove you can teach old dogs new tricks after all

AS THE WORLD gets to grips with Metallica's 11th studio album proper, Overkill are close to lapping them with their 20th. The New Jersey thrashers might have spent four decades jostling elbows with Exodus and Testament just outside the Big 4, but they've always maintained their distinct approach, complete with pneumatic grooves, holler-along hooks and Bobby 'Blitz' Ellsworth's instantly recognisable warbling growl.

As the title track opens things up, it seems like not much has changed. After a Van Halen-esque thrash-with-flash eruption of guitar, they let the wrecking ball swing once more for six minutes or so of distilled Overkill mayhem. Launching from a classic D.D. Verni bassline, *The Surgeon* is even more in-your-face. It has all the pit-whipping ingredients of classic Overkill and, with all the experience they've now accrued, it's delivered with such skill and style that it would comfortably fit anywhere in their considerable back catalogue and still be one of the best songs on there.

So far, so consistent, and the band have certainly been that over the years. What makes *Scorched* really stand out are the moments that reach out in new directions. *Wicked Place* has a slow-burn build-up reminiscent of Diamond Head's *Am I Evil?*, but when the dam bursts, it releases a rollicking bluesy riff like something from Metallica's *Load/Reload* era. *Won't Be Coming Back* packs in Iron Maiden levels of clean guitar melodies and there are several points throughout the album where they lean towards classic metal rather than straight-ahead thrash. *Fever* is another curveball featuring gothic atmospherics and a second-half riff that could have come from Black Label Society.

They're all given a suitably serrated edge and Bobby's vocals ensure you won't be mistaking them for anyone else, but *Scorched* sees Overkill celebrate this milestone in an expansive mood.

FOR FANS OF: Exodus, Death Angel, Metallica

PAUL TRAVERS

PRESS

Powerwolf: remember, they're lupine, not supine

POWERWOLF

Interludium

NAPALM

Teutonic power metallers refuse to go into standby mode

WHEN IS AN album not an album? The so-called "Easter offering" from German heavy metallers Powerwolf is partly a look into the future, with six brand-new songs, and partly a recognition of their past in the form of various rarities. With such an on-the-nose title as *Interludium* it's not exactly trying to hide its purpose, which is to tide fans over with a sort-of album until a release of all-new material. That's not something the band take lightly, as the live and covers album – in which their peers record versions of their songs, not the other way around – they released last year shows. In fact, *Interludium* has such an album included as a bonus disc in most editions, on which they have once again enlisted the likes of Electric Callboy, Annisokay, Ad Infinitum and Rage to give their take on Powerwolf songs.

With that in mind, *Interludium* does exactly what it says on the tin. Where Powerwolf are at sonically 18 months on from *Call Of The Wild* is hardly a deviation from their tried and tested formula. From the outset, *Wolves Of War* is as massive, rousing and cinematic as anything off their last record, but with a folk-metal slant. In true Powerwolf style, a layer of raucous chants in the mix give each new track the feel of a battle anthem; the galloping rhythms and incandescent organ lend songs like *Wolfborn* a sense of potent urgency, while the bombastic drum intro on *Sainted By The Storm* is pure arena metal. It's all stuff you could imagine singing along to, but it's very much Powerwolf's usual shtick, and, with the inclusion of B-sides that include a French version of *Beast Of Gevaudan – Bête du Gévaudan* – it could be seen as an indulgence for diehard fans, or simply an act of breadcrumbing.

Either way, it perhaps raises a question of how much output is really necessary for a band at Powerwolf's level, so soon after their last studio album. In other words, do we need this now?

FOR FANS OF: **Sabaton, Korpiklaani, Beast In Black**

CATHERINE MORRIS

SØSTRE

Søstre

LOYAL BLOOD

Bergen newbies keep the punk'n'roll flag flaying

If a band are from Bergen, Norway, the chances are you'll assume they're black metal or Scandi punk'n'roll. Søstre, rather excitingly, are both. The title track has the kind of groove and wiry guitar leads that Hellacopters fans would adore, but the blasting drums and barbaric screech of the vocals give it an icy BM blast. Comparisons to Kvelertak are almost bound to follow Søstre around, but this might actually be the finest example of that sound since their forebears' classic debut album. Pumped full of killer riffs, extreme aggression and huge hooks, *Søstre* is another great debut from the Nordic scene.

FOR FANS OF: **Kvelertak, Man The Machetes, Ondt Blod**

STEPHEN HILL

SWAN VALLEY HEIGHTS

Terminal Forest

FUZZORAMA

German stoner doom unit share some strange sonic bedfellows

Despite very different approaches and results, there was some shared headspace between QOTSA's debut and *Discouraged Ones*-era Katatonia. A scrupulous focus on bare-bones economy and a rare blend of numbed detachment and bleary-eyed subjugation intimated an odd commonality between SoCal stoners and Stockholm goths for one brief window in 1998. Twenty-five years on, these doomsters are squeegeeing the dust from that window. David Kreisl's smooth, emotive vocals float between Josh Homme and Jonas Renkse, the trio's classy interplay keeping an uncluttered atmospheric flow amid playful instrumental quirks. Swan Valley Heights' epic jams have a far more expansive, spontaneous dynamic, though, plus some beguiling rustic qualities of their own.

FOR FANS OF: **Kyuss, Pink Floyd, Truckfighters**

CHRIS CHANTLER

SWOLLEN TEETH

Swollen Teeth

BLOWED OUT

Sid Wilson-produced newcomers offer a feast for the Maggots

If you couldn't get onboard with the experimental dynamism of Slipknot's *The End, So Far,* this Swollen Teeth EP might be exactly what you're looking for. The masked US quartet are produced by Slipknot DJ Sid Wilson, and their filth-encrusted, mechanical nu metal is reminiscent of the days Slipknot sounded like a psychotic zombie apocalypse tearing out of a slaughterhouse. *Car Crash* opens with sinister electronics and buzzsaw guitars, settling into a monstrous groove, while *Bike Ride* is the opposite of a leisurely day out, with blastbeats heralding a rising sense of horror, chaotic riffs and a glint of danger lurking around every corner. This is something the Maggots can unite behind.

FOR FANS OF: **Slipknot, Tallah, Cane Hill**

DANNII LEIVERS

PRESS

THRON
Dust
LISTENABLE

High-end BM from the darkest recesses of the Black Forest

Two years on from the highly regarded *Pilgrim* LP, this Germanic black metal horde have returned with another blast of top-tier nastiness. Fourth album *Dust* sees them melding clinical, icily orthodox riffing, savagely direct drumming and twisted melodic sensibilities to create a harsh but engaging din. Opener *Dying In The Mud* is suitably epic in a downbeat, nihilistic sort of way, and sets the tone nicely. *Into Oblivion* has a gothic feel that brings to mind Tribulation, while *The Tyranny Of I* straddles the line between Mgła and Watain – all razor-sharp guitars and red-raw vocals. There are 11 slabs of forward-looking metal delivered with devilish intent and no mean ability. *Dust* is a fine piece of work and signals Thron's arrival as real contenders.

FOR FANS OF: Necrophobic, Watain, Kriegsmaschine

ALASTAIR RIDDELL

TRIBULATION
Hamartia
CENTURY MEDIA

A tantalising taster from new-look gothic heroes

2021's *Where The Gloom Becomes Sound* was a watershed moment for Sweden's Tribulation. Not only was it the zenith of their enthralling blend of gothic-steeped traditionalism, but it marked the final chapter with key songwriter Jonathan Hultén. As such, this EP gives a much-needed fix while offering a first glimpse of the creative dynamic of guitarist Adam Zaars and Hultén's replacement, Joseph Tholl. Given the gloss of *Where The Gloom Becomes Sound*, the title track and *Hemoclysm* understandably have a bit more grit underneath their fingernails, but a bevy of moody hooks and beguiling menace – topped off with a Blue Öyster Cult cover – demonstrate that it's not just countrymen Ghost who have the secret to alluringly macabre tunes. Despite being only a morsel when a feast would be ravenously accepted, Tribulation's new incarnation clearly has more than enough wind to keep the gloomy banner flying.

FOR FANS OF: Ghost, Cloak, In Solitude

ADAM BRENNAN

ÚLFÚÐ
Of Existential Distortion
DARK DESCENT

Ferocious debut from Icelandic blackened death crew

Hailing from the land of fire and ice, Úlfúð's sound is a worthy analogue to the terrain that birthed it. Desolate, unforgiving and often majestic, this Reykjavík quintet summon the broody vehemence of the region's volcanic wastelands, with vocalist Breki Danielsen Imsland spewing molten rage as his amigos revel in their swaggering despond. Opener *Where Strange Lights Dance* is a real standout, with its hopscotching riffs committing the Saint Vitus twist over withering chord progressions, while *Questions* is a cyclonic conundrum hatched in a nest of screams. Elsewhere, a fleeting folk choir on *Gods Left Behind* – reminiscent of an interlude from Ulver's *Bergtatt* – is the kind of devil-in-the-detail flourish that marks Úlfúð out as exciting. Props also to Bahrull Marta for his nightmarish endtimes whorl that graces this fine album's cover.

FOR FANS OF: Theotoxin, Sinmara, Dissection

SPENCER GRADY

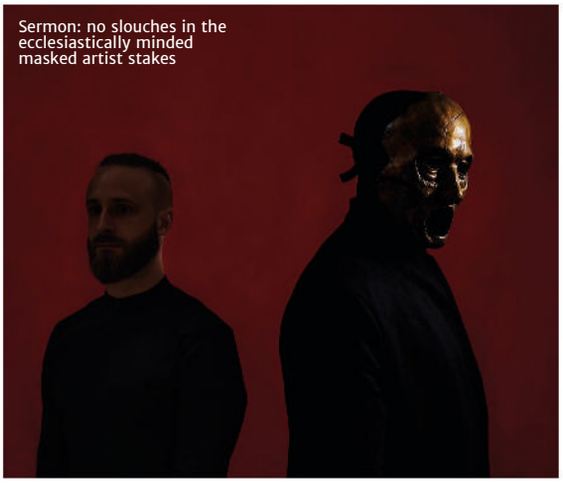
VERMINOUS SERPENT
The Malign Covenant
AMOR FATI

Primordial frontman leads an extracurricular crawl into the abyss

This new project from Slidhr guitarist Joseph Deegan, Malthusian's drummer Matt Bree and Primordial's Alan Averill on bass and vocals makes its full-length debut with a 41-minute exercise in glowering, doom-laden black metal. The five songs here balance masterfully sustained atmospherics with hard-bitten riffage, the brooding lurch of the title track – which, like everything here, takes time to build up its formidable momentum – being a good indication of the trio's capabilities. The 13-minute closer, *Deaths Head Mantra*, meanwhile, introduces some faster-paced riffing and drumless interludes to terrific cumulative effect. At times, Verminous Serpent seem to reach outside of BM towards the bleak churn of vintage UK moshers Cerebral Fix circa 1990's *Tower Of Spite*. An impressive debut that resonates with all the confidence and experience of its creators.

FOR FANS OF: Primordial, Slidhr, Malthusian

JOSEPH STANNARD



Sermon: no slouches in the ecclesiastically minded masked artist stakes

SERMON
Of Golden Verse
PROSTHETIC

Cryptic duo weave an opulent tapestry of rage and riches

EVEN THOUGH IT'S become an increasingly common gimmick, an artist presenting themselves under an anonymous guise still has the ability to captivate in a world of easy answers and access. While half of UK duo Sermon plies their trade behind Decapitated's drumkit, a mysterious masked multi-instrumentalist only known as Him naturally adds a sense of intrigue. The interest was also enhanced by the band going silent just months after the release of 2019 debut *Birth Of The Marvellous* and a solitary show, only to emerge again nearly three years later.

The most important element in Sermon's appeal, however, is their melody and cinematic, progressive doom. The ceremony is continued on *Birth...*'s follow-up, swapping some of the despair for a more acerbic tone. With a wall of atmospheric backing, the opening summoning of *Royal* captures the mood with Him's rich, disdainful tones over James Stewart's tom-heavy drums.

For all the gravity of its religious overtones and theatrical intentions, it's the percussion that makes *Of Golden Verse* such an impressive feat. Combining a broad variety of styles, the rhythms give each track an immensely individual feel, from the histrionics of the multiheaded *Light The Witch* to the mournful melodies, blastbeats and riffs of *Departure*'s vitriolic discourse. This range of dynamics is most heavily exemplified by the gorgeous, delicate build of *Senescence* that then descends into the bludgeoning depths of *Wake The Silent*. Electronics don't overstay their welcome, giving way instead to Gregor Mackintosh-style leads, intricate snare work and another weighty vocal.

Whether Him's hidden identity adds any magnitude to proceedings is circumstantial, with the evidence of the intuitiveness and breadth of his musical output far more compelling.

FOR FANS OF: Katatonia, Crippled Black Phoenix, Paradise Lost

ADAM BRENNAN

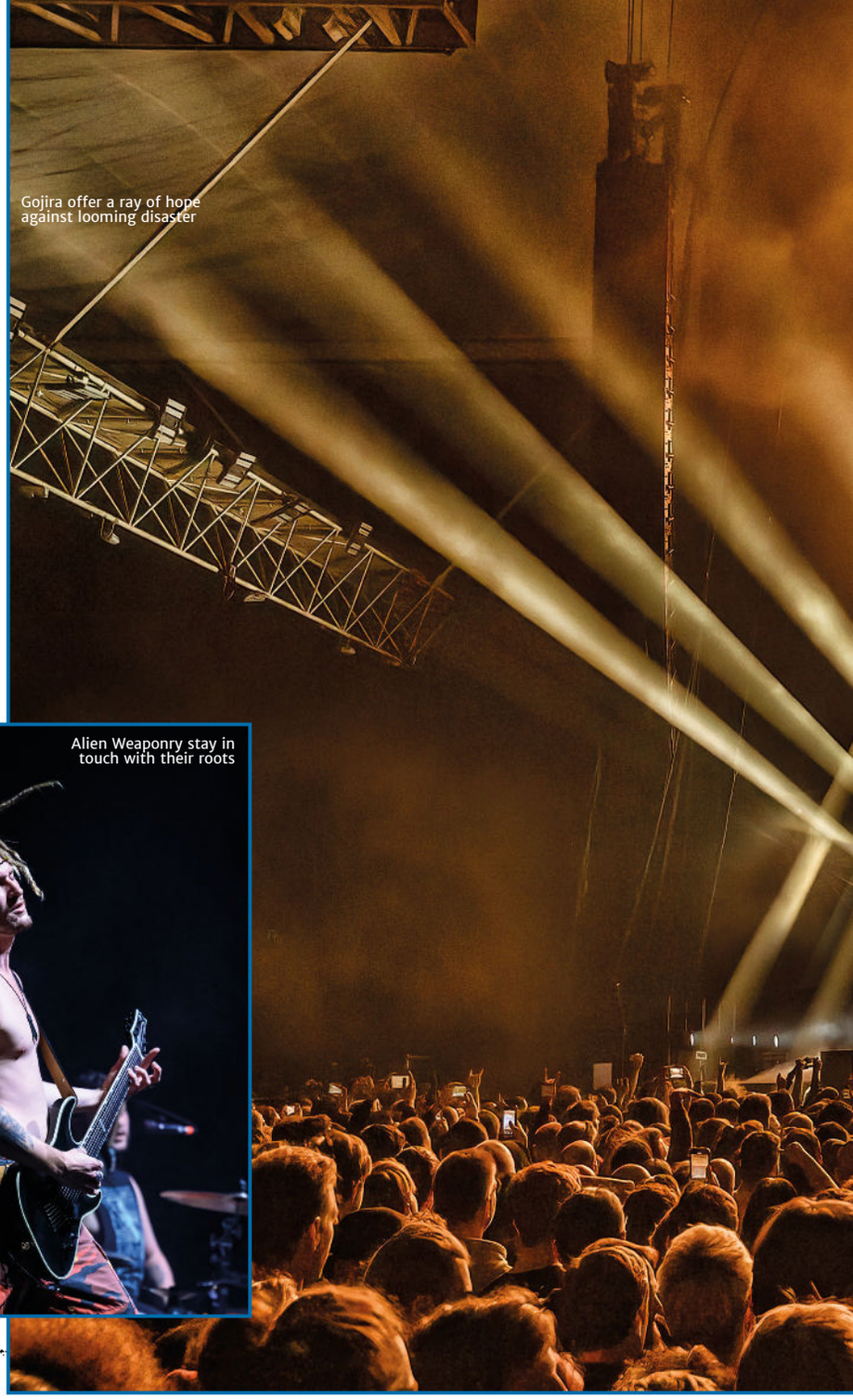
PRESS

LIVE REVIEWS

GOJIRA
ALIEN WEAPONRY / EMPLOYED TO SERVE

ALEXANDRA PALACE, LONDON

France's groove metal expansionists elevate the capital



Gojira offer a ray of hope against looming disaster

Alien Weaponry stay in touch with their roots

REVIEWING GOJIRA'S MOST recent album, *Fortitude*, in 2021, *Hammer* concluded: "If they aren't playing arenas at the end of this album cycle, it's probably your fault." That's because those songs were genetically engineered for big rooms. They condensed the French behemoth's technical prog/groove metal bludgeonings into anthems accessible and socially conscious enough to ignite a revolution.

In the two years since, the heavy metal masses have lifted Gojira to monolithic status. *Fortitude*'s tracks have been streamed a total of 97 million times, and the band's first UK tour since 2019 sees them enrapture the 10,000-plus-capacity Alexandra Palace. But before extreme metal's greatest kaiju can all but level this Grade II-listed building, **EMPLOYED TO SERVE** sneak in a rampage of their own. The metalcore hellraisers let the material of new album *Conquering* live up to its name by taking over the venue. Single *Mark Of The Grave*'s mid-paced percussion epitomises the band's MO of jamming hardcore through a filter of 90s groove metal. All the while, the five-piece fill the stage neatly, with singer Justine Jones proving an early visual standout in her funerary black dress. ETS are already one of the British underground's leaders, and it seems like they're destined for bigger things yet.

Gojira couldn't have picked a more apt support than **ALIEN WEAPONRY**. Like tonight's main event, the New Zealand boys are injustice-fighting groove metal warriors, except their focus is firmly on decrying the persecution of their country's indigenous Māori people, as well as celebrating their heritage. Their songs are sung in te reo Māori and drummer Henry de Jong always kickstarts the set with a haka, which tonight sounds as formidable as ever. From here, it's Sepultura's *Roots* but Polynesian: big riffs and even heftier-sounding snares, all stacked alongside forceful singing and chanting. It's a primal feast that Ally Pally wolfs down, especially when *Kai Tangata* inspires the first crowdsurfers of the evening.

As great as both of those openers are, however, **GOJIRA** are one of the best metal bands on the planet. The Ondres activists escaped the seclusion of rural France using nothing but the authority of their music, inspired by the heaviness of Machine Head and Morbid Angel as well as the precision of mid-90s Death. Meanwhile, the lyrics have retained an earnest drive to see a better world, since the current one made a habit of staining the beaches the band grew up near with crude oil. It's now been a 20-year-plus campaign to push metal forward and climate change backward, and tonight feels like its apex.

The vast main hall is rammed and the anticipation is palpable as a countdown to Gojira's arrival is projected onto a curtain concealing the stage. The second the timer hits zero, the scraping riff and scrambling drums of *Born For One Thing* blare. Then civility becomes a memory. Heads bang to that first apocalyptic breakdown, throats shred themselves mimicking the chorus, then pits start forming from the most cathartic joy.

Subsequent classics *The Heaviest Matter Of The Universe* and *Backbone* don't have the anthemic release of the *Fortitude* track, but by God(zilla) do

THE SET

GOJIRA

Born For One Thing
The Heaviest Matter Of The Universe
Backbone
Stranded
Flying Whales
The Cell
The Art Of Dying
Drum Solo
Grind
Another World
L'Enfant Sauvage
Our Time Is Now
The Chant
Toxic Garbage Island
Amazonia

ENCORE

Silvera
New Found
The Gift Of Guilt

KATJA OGRIN

they double down on the heaviness. The latter's onslaught of beatdowns also makes it a prime place for Gojira to flaunt their firepower, as fireballs go up and CO2 cannons explode in front of a huge video backdrop framed by rows of LEDs.

The visuals also mark the commencement of perpetual meme machine, *Flying Whales*. A clip of a whale swimming across the screen is soon accompanied by that iconic guitar arpeggio – not to mention a widening pit and blow-up orcas being chucked about by the crowd. It's not a reaction the band necessarily welcome (Joe's previously lamented audiences greeting a song that worships nature by lobbing plastic into the air), but it's perfect evidence of the dedication Gojira inspire in their acolytes.

Such passion returns for *The Chant*. The *Fortitude* rocker's wordless 'whoa'-along of a chorus is prime evidence of that album's drive to bring Gojira's brutality to the masses. So, hearing 10,000 pick that hook up and carry it all the way to the back of the venue is the greatest success they could have hoped for, not to mention a candidate for tonight's most powerful moment.

And that's the best thing about Gojira, really. Sure, they're heavy as fuck, their big screen wows and they have spotlights that brighten with every pickscrape. Beyond that, though, they're just inspirational. Their songs inspire communal singing, headbanging and moshing without fail. Their climate-aware songs have inspired legitimate activism. And their ascent to arenas exhibits the payoff of a two-decade-long grind. As London heads home, unified and bedazzled by what it's seen, it's clear Gojira are a band that simply make everything better.

MATT MILLS

Employed To Serve leave their stamp on Ally Pally

BULLET FOR MY VALENTINE

JINJER / ATREYU

O2 ACADEMY, BRISTOL

South Wales's metal powerhouse bond with their unruly neighbours

AS THE VENUE stops raving to Darude's 90s smash, *Sandstorm* – what *is* it with metal fans in the UK and the cheesy Eurodance of yesteryear? – **ATREYU** arrive for half an hour of both current and nostalgia-inducing metalcore. It's as slick and professional as you'd expect, but nothing fully gets off the ground. Whether it's the newer blasts of *Save Us* and *Drowning* or the age-old classics of *Becoming The Bull* and closing track *Blow*, it's hard to shake the feeling that the band are going through the motions, despite the sold-out crowd lapping them up.

There's almost as much excitement for **JINJER** as there is for tonight's headliners, and the Ukrainian prog-metallers aren't about to let anyone down. Technically gorgeous one moment and unrelentingly visceral the next, they're one of the hottest bands on the planet right now and, in Tatiana Shmayluk, have one of the most magnetic frontpeople. Looking like a Marvel supervillain, she is literally *glowing* under the lights as the quartet rip through *Pit Of Consciousness* and a stunning *Colossus* to an audience growing ever more rabid. One day, they will sell out venues of this size, no doubt about that.

If the pits were violent before, though, they're nothing to what explodes when **BULLET FOR MY VALENTINE** come on and blaze into opening track, *Knives*. This is the closest they're getting to a hometown show on this tour and, having recovered from illness, they're taking no prisoners. Following track *Over It* sees the room become a bouncing sea of bodies and business picks up even more with *4 Words (To Choke Upon)*. It also begins a sensational, eight-song run that includes *Hearts Burst Into Fire* – in the set for the first time in seven years and bringing the house down – a bludgeoning *The Last Fight* and a seismic rendition of *Shatter*, whose heft on that main riff is ridiculous; to boot, Matt Tuck is looking every inch the seasoned, monolithic frontman we know and love. There's a bit of a lull through *Rainbow Veins* and *Don't Need You* – even a high-octane audience needs the occasional breather – but the energy is back up for *Death By A Thousand Cuts*, and it's definitely returned for the final triumvirate of *Your Betrayal*, *Tears Don't Fall* and a rip-snorting *Waking The Demon*. Their career has had many peaks and troughs, but right now Bullet may be more beloved than ever before.

ELLIOT LEAVER

Jinjer's Tatiana Shmayluk: all systems glow

Bullet For My Valentine: Matt Tuck keeps calm amid the carnage

EMMA PAINTER

PIL & BUE
LÜT
STUDENTHUSET CITY SCENE, ALTA

Nestled in a fjord in the northernmost tip of Norway that's currently keeping the temperature to a crisp -11°C, Alta may not be the centre of the country's rock and metal map, but tonight it's the nexus for a vibrant Arctic scene. **LÜT** hail from Tromsø further west, but they're greeted by a busy crowd like hometown heroes. Part of the Turbonegro-channelling punk explosion that detonated in the wake of Kvelertak, the five-piece have still carved out their own unique corner, emphasising melody over firecracker aggression, and folding aerated 70s rock riffs into the ever-nudging grooves and gang-on-holiday chants. Guitarist-turned-lead vocalist Mads Ystmark is a louche yet charismatic focal point, too: part wily, Ville Valo urchin, part Jagger-esque camp. **PIL & BUE** *are* Alta locals, and tonight they're awash with all the heightened energy you could hope for from a hometown gig. A two-piece vastly more than the sum of their parts, their deeply invested fusion of metal and pop-bordering melodic dynamics is given emotional rocket fuel by Petter Carlsen's unrestrained vocals. Sia fronting Gojira is an approximation, but the result is exhilarating and uncontrived, and resonates on every level.

JONATHAN SELZER

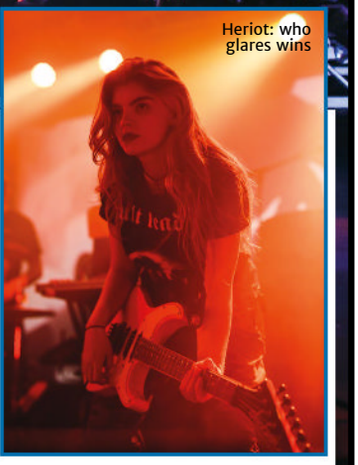
OBITUARY
CONJURER
ELECTRIC BALLROOM, LONDON

Any band supporting Obituary face a challenge, and tonight **CONJURER** acquit themselves brilliantly. They're most impressive when beating a riff into the ground, rather than indulging their progressive inclinations. The periodic detours into bucolic melancholia are adeptly performed, but ultimately serve as a breather between stretches of pummelling brutality. When **OBITUARY** finally burst into *Redneck Stomp* amid columns of smoke, the crowd goes batshit. This tour is in support of the band's 11th album, *Dying Of Everything*, and they're clearly confident in the new material, with five new tracks – *Barely Alive, The Wrong Time, My Will To Live*, the title track and *War* – taking a hefty bite out of the setlist. The lava flow carnage of *The Wrong Time* is especially immense with its oddly post-punkish bounce; *Dying Of Everything* is like taking a Great Old One's knee to the face; the FX-laden doom vortex of *War* is similarly explosive. There's also plenty of vintage violence. *Dying, Don't Care, Chopped In Half* and *Turned Inside Out* get gloriously vicious renditions, and final encore, *Slowly We Rot*, revisits the band's beginnings before they make their exit, leaving the crowd bloodied, satiated and bewildered.

JOSEPH STANNARD

Rolo Tomassi: Eva Korman experiences a full sweep of emotion

Holy Fawn seek out the sublime



Heriot: who glares wins

ROLO TOMASSI

HOLY FAWN / HERIOT

ELECTRIC BALLROOM, LONDON

Expansive post-hardcore heroes make a deep, emotional connection

ROLO TOMASSI'S UNIQUE take on post-hardcore continues to convert people, with tonight's show the biggest headliner the Sheffield quartet have played to date. But first, **HERIOT** are on blistering form. They're tight and focused – despite a false start that vocalist/guitarist Debbie Gough endearingly apologies for – and it says much for their future that the best song of the night by far is *Demure*, which premiered just a couple of days previously. Heriot's debut headline UK tour will have no doubt sold out by the time you read this, and with performances like this, it's easy to see why.

HOLY FAWN's Bandcamp bio states they make "loud heavy pretty noises". It's not wrong, but it doesn't do justice to the Arizonan quartet's sheer, dark majesty. The Ballroom is entranced during a 45-minute set that ebbs and flows dynamically through the twinkling guitars of post-rock to the searing screams of hardcore. Ending on a sublime *Seer*, Holy Fawn are God-tier. You should see them at your earliest convenience.

ROLO TOMASSI stroll out confidently, and as the rich strains of *Almost Always* burst forth like an exploding mirror ball, the audience takes a sharp intake of breath as one. It's a superb start, and so it's a shame when the usually crushing *Cloaked* comes through the PA sounding a little weak. Sound gremlins are fixed, however, as Eva Korman's captivating dancing leads the band into a double whammy of *Opalescent* and *Stage Knives*.

High emotion at just how far the band have come from the exciting but unfocused Nintendocore of 15 years ago is evident throughout the show. Perhaps that and last-night-of-the-tour fatigue account for a few minor note wobbles, but the connection between band and fans is startling to witness at the end of a formidable *A Flood Of Light*. The concluding refrain of *'But there you are, always'*, sung back by the crowd, elicits an emotional response that forces the band to pause and wipe tears from their eyes. With moments as organically attained and deserved as this, it seems churlish to complain about a couple of slightly flat notes. Rolo Tomassi are one of the most forward-thinking contemporary bands the UK has right now. It's good to see them finally revered as such.

REMFRY DEDMAN

BEAST IN BLACK

FIREWIND

ISLINGTON ASSEMBLY HALL, LONDON

'Greek god' Gus G plays the unassuming starring role in **FIREWIND**'s support slot, and while Herbie Langhans' formidable vocals compete for the spotlight, there's a charm to the guitarist's fluid, relaxed style of playing that makes it hard to look away, especially when his guitar lights up neon red during *The Fire And The Fury*. The spectacle continues for Finnish powerhouse **BEAST IN BLACK**. From the cyborg manikins peering over tonight's electric entertainment to numerous rock star poses and big singalongs, there's an air of revelry that feels better suited to a Saturday night. As the band begin *Blade Runner* from 2021's brilliant sci-fi romp *Dark Connection*, the crowd lose themselves in its infectious chorus. Over almost two hours, BIB take a ride through raucous riffs, disco stomp and galloping power metal without seemingly taking a breather. The newer material goes down a treat, but relative oldies like *Sweet True Lies* and *Blind And Frozen* carve themselves out as highlights, as Yannis Papadopoulos's baffling range continues to encompass the highest of notes. The leather-clad disco delirium of *One Night In Tokyo* rounds off a long set, and one that captures guitarist Anton Kabanen's ever-evolving songwriting mastery.

HOLLY WRIGHT

DREAM THEATER

ARION

HAMMERSMITH APOLLO, LONDON

US/Canadian prog-metal kingpins Dream Theater have regularly visited this legendary concert hall, and they're back for a victory lap to end a trek for their finest album in many years, *A View From The Top Of The World*. Most of tonight's audience opts to stay out in the bar for the drab, perfunctory, keyboard-decorated power-metal of Finland's **ARION**. It's a wise call. Having played Wembley Arena a mere 10 months earlier, the headliners tweak tonight's set slightly, though its thrust, which very much focuses on the heavier side of their oeuvre, remains identical. Often coloured by beautiful melodies, this is heavy-tread riffage delivered by a level of musicianship that not only leaves supposed rivals eating the band's dust but wondering, 'How the fuck did they just do that?' And if James LaBrie's voice sometimes sounds slightly ragged at the end of a long tour, well… as a non-instrumentalist he's not onstage for the whole show anyway. Clocking in at almost an hour long, the final three songs – *Pull Me Under*, *A View From The Top Of The World* and a succulent, drama-filled encore of *The Count Of Tuscany* – is a climax of near-religious proportions.

DAVE LING

DEREK BREMNER

Katatonia's Jonas Renkse: more than one 'hit' but still a wonder

KATATONIA

SÓLSTAFIR / SOM

FORUM, LONDON

Sweden's masters of melancholy cast a spell over Kentish Town

HEAVY AS IT may be, **SOM**'s expansive blend of shoegaze and post-rock is also wonderfully soothing – even more so with the elaborate light show that spreads out from behind them and pans over the audience, making their set feel like a meditative experience. The band themselves appear shrouded in shadow while the lights beam. But they're not totally inconspicuous; frontman Will Benoit frequently voices his gratitude and excitement, thanking both the audience and the bands that will follow them tonight.

With their rock'n'roll cowboy threads, Icelandic post-metallers **SÓLSTAFIR** look like a real gang. It's no surprise that they find sonic and style inspiration from English goth legends Fields Of The Nephilim, who also took to this very stage to record their live VHS, *Forever Remain*, back in 1988. It's a fact that frontman Aðalbjörn 'Addi' Tryggvason alludes to tonight, and clearly makes the evening extra special for them. Unlike SOM, Sólstafir are far from faceless as they swagger across the stage, but they're similarly backed by a gorgeous lightshow that makes their richly melodic anthems such as *Fjara* and *Ótta* feel all the more magical. In Addi, Sólstafir have a charismatic frontman who knows how to work the stage. Throughout tonight's show, he interacts with the audience, whether he's encouraging them to shout in unison or climbing into the crowd and grabbing their hands for closing track *Goddess Of The Ages*. But all the bandmembers command the stage with confidence, locked into a singular, out-of-time adventure.

Tonight, **KATATONIA** are missing co-founder and bassist Anders Nyström due to "personal family reasons," and are instead joined by Entombed/Entombed A.D. member Nico Elgstrand, who slots in with ease. Having released their 12th album, *Sky Void Of Stars*, in January, tonight's set gives the new songs an airing right from the start as they open with its first two tracks, *Austerity* and *Colossal Shade*. They soar with rich, melodic choruses and progressive chug, as the sweeping lights and smoke emanating from behind the darkened figures onstage add to the heady atmospheres of the music. When he's not belting out those choruses, Jonas Renkse is on typically deadpan form in between the songs, making quips about Good Friday, praising Satan, and describing *My Twin* as the band's "one and only hit". But going by the audience's ecstatic reaction to their performance tonight, it's abundantly clear that it isn't true.

HANNAH MAY KILROY

Sólstafir: direct from the wild west of Iceland

JAMES SHARROCK

Batushka redefine the term 'Orthodox black metal'

BATUSHKA

HATE / GHOSTS OF ATLANTIS

THE DOME, LONDON

Schism-rocked black metallers bring deliverance to the devout

HAILING FROM THE deepest wilds of… Ipswich, **GHOSTS OF ATLANTIS** are an ambitious amalgam of modern metals: a little bit symphonic, a little bit death metal and, thanks to guitarist Colin Parks's mightily impressive backing vocals, a big chunk of power metal. There's even a hint of black metal about their presentation, albeit hampered by the tiny amount of stage left to them. We're intrigued to see where they go next.

For the best part of three decades, Polish heavyweights **HATE** have made their name with ferocious, almost mechanically tight, grinding death metal. The last few years, however, have seen them adopt a more blackened approach, and tonight's set is mostly drawn from 2019's *Auric Gates Of Veles* and 2021's *Rugia*. While still boasting surgical precision, from the opening attack of *The Wolf Queen*, there is much more of a sense of depth and space to their sound now, coupled with some theatrical touches, all of which have given the death metal veterans a new lease of life.

You wait ages for an Eastern Orthodox black metal hybrid and then two arrive once. With two **BATUSHKA**s touring, this being original vocalist Bartłomiej Krysiuk's iteration, we could spend ages talking about the drama, lawsuits and bitter recriminations, but really the proof of the pudding is in the eating. Or the candles. Lots of candles. The term 'ritual' is bandied around a lot, but here, centred around ancient Slavonic liturgies, it really is appropriate. Wreathed with incense, the robed figures, illuminated by the flickering of those hundreds of candles, intone in ancient voices, evoking a dreamlike metallic din. With the lack of traditional amp stacks and the drummer hidden away in a corner behind a screen, it's only the guitars hanging from two 'priests' that serve to remind us this is actually just a gig.

Batushka are heavy, of course – this is black metal after all – but there's a hypnotic quality to tracks like *Wieczernia* and *Yekteniya III: Premudrost'* that take us on an ecclesiastical trip. Regardless of the acrimonious backstory of the two Batushkas, tonight is a triumph.

ALASTAIR RIDDELL

Hate lean into their blackened side

KEVIN NIXON

MESSA

BLACK HEART, LONDON

Italian outfit Messa are greeted rapturously by a capacity crowd, and with good reason. Over the past few years, they've released a run of impressive albums that take doom metal as the springboard for all manner of sonic adventures, resulting in a sound that's both timely and timeless. That they're as capable of delivering in a live setting as they are on record makes them even more cherishable. In addition to incorporating elements of 60s folk rock and psychedelia, with echoes of Mellow Candle, Comus and The Doors, Messa take a scholarly approach, reaching back into the roots of doom to the blues and jazz that formed the early listening habits of genre forefather Tony Iommi. Hence the delicate Django Reinhardt-ish noodling from Alberto Piccolo, the bluesy curvaceousness of his soloing overall and the muscular swing that underscores the band's rhythms. Then of course there are Sara Bianchin's formidable vocals – powerful and perfectly pitched throughout the set. She is apocalypse cult priestess one minute, avenging angel the next, harbinger of ruin in between. There's a theatrical feel to the performance, but it's all contained within the music itself, with no need for extraneous frills. Doom in excelsis.

JOSEPH STANNARD

REVOCATION

GOATWHORE / ALLUVIAL / CREEPING DEATH

THE FLEECE, BRISTOL

Bolstered by a healthy sound and an early bunch of headbangers, Texan death metallers **CREEPING DEATH** incorporate a hefty dose of groove in among their breakdowns and high, onstage energy. Portland's **ALLUVIAL** switch the groove for more progressive elements but, despite delivering a strong and technically adept set, largely fail to get the audience moving. The last time **GOATWHORE** graced this venue, frontman Ben Falgoust II was in plaster following a leg break, so to see him fully mobile again is excellent. The band kick things up a notch or six with their brand of blackened death and thrash, *Born Of Satan's Flesh* in particular going down well, with many fingers waggling to the blastbeats. Coming on to the strains of Carl Orff's *O Fortuna*, **REVOCATION** are incendiary. The pit erupts the second opener *Nihilistic Violence* commences and doesn't let up until the Boston technical thrashers are closing with *Dismantle The Dictator*. Backed by a simple yet powerful lightshow that emphasises the ferocity of their music, the trio – aided by touring guitarist Noah Young – are as tight as a drum and just as bludgeoning. *Of Unworldly Origin*? Seemingly so!

ELLIOT LEAVER

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AVATAR

FORUM, LONDON

Sweden's madcap showmen roll up in scintillating form

IT'S ALWAYS A good time whenever the Swedish metal circus Avatar roll into town, and tonight at the Forum is certainly no exception. Drawing heavily from 2014's breakthrough *Hail The Apocalypse* and their most recent album, *Dance Devil Dance*, the delightfully wacky Gothenburg five-piece are ever the consummate entertainers as they emerge from cages and rip into the self-titled opening track from the latter with a contagious energy that instantly invokes frenzy from the London crowd. An onslaught of heaviness from the outset, they start at a 10 and don't let up for close to two hours.

Theirs is a strange path, but luckily they've got Johannes Eckerström to steer them. Arguably one of the most captivating frontmen in metal, he's at once imposing and affable. Roaring through the misanthropic *Valley Of Disease* with a wide Joker grin plastered on his face, clowning at every opportunity while onstage – literally, as he puts in a brief stint on the balcony tying balloon animals and playing the trombone – his towering Nordic stature and Gene Simmons-like serpentine tongue make it impossible to look away.

That's not to take away from the rest of the band, who sound fantastic and fill the venue with an Earth-shaking onslaught of heaviness. The hypnotic, cyclical riff from *Bloody Angel*, plonked satisfyingly in the middle of the set to ensure there's no lull, sounds so massive that multiple calls to the chiropractor the following day seem inevitable. A brief reprieve for the crowd's necks comes in the form of *Tower*, which Johannes performs alone with a toy grand piano for comedic effect.

It's a polished show, for sure, with every aspect considered in granular detail – the petrol can that Johannes chugs from between songs, the marionette-like movements of drummer John Alfredsson – but somehow it still feels as organic, down and dirty as any heavy metal show. By the time they get to an encore of *Dance Devil Dance*'s funky, uptempo lead single, *The Dirt I'm Buried In*, and *Smells Like A Freakshow*, seemingly half the audience have surfed over the barrier in ecstasy.

"Without you," rumbles Johannes to the enraptured crowd reverentially, "we're just five assholes in an empty room." Paint smeared, he bows deeply on his way offstage. Assholes or not, Avatar have proven time and again they might just be some of heavy metal's greatest showmen.

CATHERINE MORRIS

Avatar: the perfect antidote to the winter blues

MARIE KORNER

2023 SPRING RELEASES

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THE CONCLUSION OF THE 'MELMOTH' TRILOGY - ELEGANT AND TAUT SWISS MELODIC BLACK METAL

ANARKHON - "OBIASOT DWYBAT PTNOTUN"
SÃO PAULO'S ANARKHON RAISE THE STAKES IN THE REALM OF ARCANE ROTTING DEATH METAL

BACCHUS - "II"
PSYCHEDELIC VOYAGERS BACCHUS PRESENT A DIONYSIAN TRIP INTO MIND-ALTERING BLACK METAL

PESTIFER - "DEFEAT OF THE NEMESIS"
MIND-BENDINGLY FEROCIOUS, ELABORATE AND UNPREDICTABLE BELGIAN SCI-FI DEATH METAL

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FIVE MINUTES WITH

XENOYR NE OBLIVISCARIS

The Australian prog metal maverick talks bushfires, snake attacks and being boycotted by elitists

WORDS: MATT MILLS

Your singer and violinist, Tim Charles, has said that the pandemic "came close to breaking [Ne Obliviscaris] completely". Why?
"Everyone had their own individual problems to deal with. Tim went through an awful lot with deaths in the family right in the middle of him writing his parts [for latest album *Exul*]. The drums were recorded in March 2020. The album had to be recorded across a number of years in nine different studios. When things are delayed that long, frustration seeps in. People didn't know whether the band was still happening because there had been such delays."

How did you make it through?
"What saved the band was having Patreon: we're forever grateful for being supported by such wonderful people, who helped us move forward despite going through hard times as well."

Ne Obliviscaris were one of the first metal bands to use Patreon, and now loads of bands do it. How do you feel about that?
"When we started ours in 2016, we knew we'd get heckled a bit for it. But I feel that Australian bands are at a disadvantage: if we were based in Europe, we'd probably be bigger because we'd be touring a lot more. And we did get a lot of hate mail."

Saying what?
"It was primarily people who didn't understand it and thought we were begging for money. There's a difference between begging for money and people paying and receiving something in return, like behind-the-scenes things and interviews. It's a subscription service. It was frustrating, but we've never cared about what people think too much. In the early days, when we were announced as the support for Suffocation, we received threats."

Why were you getting threats over a gig?!
"Because we weren't metal enough. At some death metal gigs just prior to this show happening, these people made some flyers that were handed out at the shows, getting people to boycott us for being a main support for Suffocation. They said, 'Violins have no place in metal,' and went on homophobic rants. It was completely ridiculous. At the end of the day, we ended up playing the show and didn't get as much as one heckler, which says a lot about the people that were threatening us."

"WE'VE RECEIVED THREATS FOR NOT BEING METAL ENOUGH"

PRESS

***Equus*, the lead single of new album *Exul*, is about the Australian bushfires of 2019 and 2020. How were you affected by what happened?**
"I wasn't affected physically, but you could see the smoke from where I live [in Melbourne]. For quite a long time, there was a haze across the city because the bushfires were so immense. I'm more of an animal person than a people person, so what got to me was seeing pictures of animals trapped against fences because they couldn't escape. They'd be scorched against the fence, like a warzone. I know some people that had to leave where they were living because they'd lost houses. There was this second-hand sense of loss, almost: feeling loss for that person that's lost everything."

It must be interesting being an animal person in Australia, considering most of those animals can kill you…
"I haven't had too many close calls with dangerous animals in Australia, but I actually grew up in Papua New Guinea. They've got their own problems with crocodiles and snakes. I remember walking along these jungle tracks with my family and standing on a Papuan black, which is one of the most venomous snakes in the world. Animals are only really dangerous if they feel threatened. When a shark attacks once in a while, people will decide they want to go out and hunt the shark, when we're the ones who've gone out into their waters and got bitten. It seems ridiculous to me."

What ended up happening with that Papuan snake?
"I completely shat myself and we all ran off! Ha ha! For the most part, you'll only come across snakes when they're sunning themselves or hungry. If you step on a snake and it's in the sun and relaxed, there's generally a delay, so you have a bit of time while the snake's confused."

***EXUL* IS OUT NOW VIA SEASON OF MIST. NE OBLIVISCARIS TOUR EUROPE IN MAY**

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